

LEAD MINING DISPUTES IN THE NORTH PENNINES.

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INTRODUCTION

The record of industrial relations within the London Lead Company was a good one, there do not seem to have been many instances of the workmen refusing to work. But there does appear to have been disputes in 1795, 1808, 1816-1817, 1863, 1872, 1890, 1892 and 1899. Unfortunately, there is very little information in the minute books relating to these occasions, and some are not mentioned at all, it is therefore possible that there were other occasions when strikes occurred.

The Blakett/Beaumont company had a similarly good record, in the case of both companies this is probably due to the system of bargains, which both companies adopted. This method of setting the work gave the miners a feeling of independence, and the feeling that every quarter they could renegotiate the terms of their employment. This feeling was in many ways false as very little in the way of negotiation took place the miners accepting the bargain offered, or not. The disputes in the Blakett/Beaumont company took place in 1760, 1795 - 1796, 1808, 1817 - 1818, 1849, 1872 - 1873, and 1882, fortunately the letter books of this company do contain information about the disputes although in some cases it is very limited.

The information gathered was found mainly in newspaper records, and I am very grateful to the staff at Darlington Record office for their help in accessing copies of the Northern Echo, and Northumberland Record Office for access to the Hexham Courant and Hexham Herald.

Chapter 1

DISPUTES IN THE EARLY YEARS 1760 TO 1820

The disputes during this period were a result of two factors a low demand for lead, and the high price of corn. The low demand for lead was largely due to the effects of war; Joseph Richmond in his letters to Sir Walter Blackett,¹ expressing his concern about the lead trade show this.

18 February 1755 "... Lead is fallen at Stockton and Hull and there are great quantities at these markets. I should be glad to know whether war is expected in Europe this summer, that I may regulate my conducting the lead trade accordingly; for if we should have a war the first market that offers will be the best but I hope an open rupture will not happen this year. ..."

21 October 1758 "... The price of lead is now dropped to £13 5s and even at this price I cant' get a quantity sold. The lead you have at market cost you £12 per fother when the mines and mills are paid so that little or nothing can be expected from the lead trade this year and I wish it may not be worse next year for the quantities at all markets are so large that I fear the price will continue to fall till we have peace. We have nothing materially stirring at present."

In January of 1759 it was reported that the company had 30,000 pieces of lead for sale but that the price of £12 15s a fother was nearly the same as the cost to produce it. The company's inability to sell their lead, meant that the Weardale pays that were due to be made in April had to be delayed until May as the company had insufficient money to pay the men. The situation had not greatly improved by June of 1759, when the instruction was made that lead was not to be sent to Blaydon, as there was more lead there than could be sold in a year.

During the 1750's there had been an increase in the price of corn, largely due to the difficulty of obtaining corn from Europe due to the war. The following article appeared in the Newcastle Courant of the 4th December 1756.²

"As we have not as yet had any declining Alterations in our Corn markets, nor any probability now of their being lower for some time; but having daily accounts of their getting higher, and of the real and deplorable distress of numbers of poor families from every quarter. We have most earnestly to recommend a generous hospitality to each particular Gentleman in his neighbourhood, when the greatest opportunity is given for the relief of numbers; and, for which, ability can never be more commendably exerted than in such worthy an timely charity. As we have had several examples, it's hoped they will in general be followed; and to which we have to add, our advises from Carlisle, say, that potatoes had for some time past sold there at five pence and six pence per Hoop; but that last week Joseph Dacre Esq; sent to the market a large quantity, which by his order were sold at two pence half penny, and will be continued."

Joseph Richmond wrote in June 1757.³

"... We have fine growing weather and the spring Corn looks well but the Winter Corn very indifferent in many places, Wheat with us is at 16s Rye at 11/6 and Oats 6s a Boll which is hard upon the poor but we expect large supplies from abroad in about a months time which it is hoped will bring down the prices considerably"

In 1757 three Acts of Parliament were passed that would, it was hoped, help to increase the amount of Corn and other necessities, that would be available, and so reduce their cost.

Cap. 1. An Act to prohibit for a time to be limited, the exportation of Corn, Malt, Meal, Flour, Bread, Biscuit and Starch. No Corn &c. to be exported from Great Britain or Ireland before 25th December 1757. This was further extended by later Acts until the 24th December 1760 (Cap. 4. 1759).

Cap.7. An Act to discontinue for a limited time the duties upon Corn and Flour imported; and also upon such Corn, Grain, Meal, Bread, Biscuit and Flour, as have been taken from the enemy, and brought into the Kingdom. This to be in place until 24 day of August next. This Act was extended until 24th December 1759.

Year	£	s	d	Year	£	s	d	Year	£	s	d
1759	1	19	10	1782	2	7	10	1805	4	7	1
1760	1	16	6	1783	3	12	8	1806	3	16	9
1761	1	10	3	1784	2	8	10	1807	3	13	1
1762	1	19	0	1785	2	1	0	1808	1	18	11
1763	2	0	9	1786	1	18	10	1809	4	14	5
1764	2	6	9	1787	2	1	2	1810	5	3	3
1765	non taken			1788	2	5	0	1811	4	12	5
1766	2	3	1	1789	2	11	2	1812	6	2	8
1767	3	4	6	1790	2	13	2	1813	5	6	6
1768	3	0	6	1791	1	19	6	1814	3	12	1
1769	2	5	8	1792	2	3	2	1815	3	3	8
1770	2	9	0	1793	2	6	0	1816	3	16	2
1771	2	7	2	1794	2	10	0	1817	4	14	0
1772	2	10	8	1795	3	15	5	1818	4	3	8
1773	2	11	0	1796	3	17	0	1819	3	12	3
1774	2	12	8	1797	2	14	10	1820	3	5	10
1775	2	8	4	1798	2	4	0	1821	2	14	5
1776	1	18	2	1799	4	10	0	1822	2	3	3
1777	2	5	6	1800	6	10	0	1823	2	11	9
1778	2	2	0	1801	5	15	11	1824	3	2	0
1779	1	13	8	1802	3	7	9	1825	3	6	6
1780	1	15	8	1803	2	17	1	1826	2	16	11
1781	2	4	8	1804	3	0	5	1827	2	16	11

Average price of Wheat per quarter⁴

Cap. 10. An Act to prohibit for a limited time the making of Low Wines and Spirits from Wheat, Barley, Malt or any other sort of Grain, or from any Meal or Flour. This to take place from 11th Day March 1757 for 2 months. This was firstly extended by Cap. 15. to 11th December 1757, and then by a series of Acts until the 24th December 1760 (Cap. 4. 1759).

The exporting of Corn &c was for a short period allowed in 1759, by the Act Cap. 8. 1758, which said that from the 25th March 1759 The exportation of Corn and Malt and Meal &c would be allowed, this was repealed in the next session of Parliament by Cap. 4. 1759, and extended to 24th December 1760.

The only reference to the dispute of 1760, appears in a letter to Mr Caleb Hunter at Allenheads from the agent at Newcastle, dated 16 January 1760.⁵

“Sir Sir Walter Blackett having received Mr Harrison's report and examined the bearer, orders that you discharge John Spark from working any longer at Allenheads

as he appears to have been the ringleader of the late tumult and if he give any further disturbance you are to get a warrant to carry him before a Justice of the Peace to be dealt with according to law. As for the other two Spark and Robinson, if they will acknowledge their fault and promise better behaviour for the future you may let them continue to work their bargain at Allison's shaft at £6 10s a ton of lead as they took at the 9 October last, if they are willing to do so, but if they are any way refractory you are to discharge them also."

The dispute of 1795 between the Blackett/Beaumont company and there miners also has its origin in the cost of corn, and dated back to December 1794, this is well documented in the company records, which are given in full below. The first letter is from John Erasmus Blackett to Mr Joseph Dickinson, dated 21 December 1794, and the second is from John Erasmus Blackett to Thomas R. Beaumont dated 27 December 1794.⁶

"I have received a letter signed by upwards of 100 of the miners of Coalcleugh, Allenheads & Allendale, complaining of the high price of Corn I desire that you will make it known to them that I am very sensible of the difficulties which thing their families are likely to labour under on that account if some method is not taken to give them relief, which it shall being endeavour to do, and for that purpose I shall lay their grievances before Colonel and Mrs Beaumont of who I am confident will compassionate to their case But that no time may be lost in procuring for them a sufficient supply of Rye at a more reasonable rate I have already contracted for a quantity from the South which on its arrival shall be sent up to the mines, I have likewise wrote to Hamburg to purchase a large quantity of Foreign Rye, but it is probable that may not arrive before the middle or end of February next and I have no doubt that Colonel and Mrs Beaumont will approve of this measure. It be Corn is very necessary that the miners &c should be undeceived respecting the present scarcity and consequent high price of Rye, and would they have been led in to by some well disposed persons. No ships with Corn have during the course of this year been refused to enter and land their loadings at the port of Newcastle, so far from that being the case a number of ships of this port could not procure a loading of Corn at any rate owing to a prohibition which taken place at Danzig & other ports in the East; The importation of Rye at this port in 1790 & 1791 reduced the price so low as to discourage the growth of that article not only in this Country but in the Southern Countries, where instead of growing Rye as formerly they now grow Turnips. The war in Poland has been a great impediment to the growth of Corn in that Country & the King of Prussia's prohibition has put a total stop to the exportation of all kinds of Grain from the ports. These have been the sole cause which occasions the present scarcity & high price of Rye.

"On your receipt of the Rye I desire that it may be delivered out to the workmen according to your discretion in proportion to the number of their respective families taking care that they have the legal measure and are not imposed on by the Millers; I would recommend to them that they make use of a mixture of potatoes with the Rye flour agreeable to the enclosed receipt, which makes wholesome good Bread. You will communicate this to the agents at the other mines as well as to the workmen at Coalcleugh."

"I engaged for a quantity of Rye from the South before the receipt of the letter from the workmen or any other Intimation."

"Enclosed I send you a letter that I received signed by a number of the workmen of your mines and likewise a copy of my letter to Mr Dickinson in answer to it. The

present very high price of Rye in which the workmen chiefly subsist, the small quantity at this market, as well as what it expected from the South; the prospect of the price not only advancing but of there being a real scarcity of the article induced me to lose no time in taking steps which I have mentioned in my letter to your Mine Agent which I hope may be a means of quieting the workmen and preventing the evil that was to be apprehended; some papers having been affixed at Allenheads and the neighbourhood of a riotous and seditious tendency I having been informed of it (this not by Mr Forster which it was his duty to do) I looked on the matter in a very serious light and thought it advisable to have a meeting with the agents and some of the workmen at Hexham on Wednesday last when after hearing their complaints, and having explained the matter fully to them, they were perfectly satisfied, and very thankful to you and Mrs Beaumont for taking their case into consideration and granting them relief. I shall be happy to find that the measures I have taken meet with your approbation. I wrote to Messrs Burrows and Son at Hamburg to purchase and ship fifty Lasts of Rye, if being the only foreign port from whence it can be procured at present, It became necessary to give them credit on London for the amount which I have accordingly done on Messrs Ransom Morley & Co advising those Gentlemen of the same desiring them to pay due Honour to the Bills of Messrs Burrows the amount of which on being advised shall be remitted to them.

"... there is little change in the state of the mines, since I wrote to you last. There is no demand for lead at present, nor can it be expected at this season. ..."

The food situation did not improve over the year and the Newcastle Courant reported in August 1795, that the price of grain was exorbitant, and that the Duke of Northumberland had ordered his stewards to buy up all the wheat that they could, in order that it could be sold to those in want at a reduced price. The Newcastle Courant on the 31 October reported that 1,000 Weardale men gathered at Wolsingham for the purpose, *"they said of regulating the market; but by the laudable exertions, and proper measures taken by the principle Gentlemen of the town, and neighbourhood all mischief was prevented."*

The behaviour of the men was praised stating that their conduct had been orderly, and they had listened attentively to the advice given to them by the Gentlemen of the town.

The miners of Weardale in November of 1795 withdrew from their bargains, and demanded an increase in their subsistence. The men were given an increase in subsistence, from 10s 6d per month, it was increased to 15s 9d, and the company continued to supply corn at a reduced price. This is documented in a letter to Thomas R. Beaumont dated 23 November from John Erasmus Blackett.⁷

"Dear Sir I wrote to you the 21st inst. in answer to your letter by that days post, which I hope that you have communicated to Mr Widdon, that he may acquaint the Bishop of Durham how very ill founded those complaints, and clamours were which had been industriously spread against you, without the least foundation of truth; had there been a cause for that charge? and the Bishop who receives £1,100 per annum and the Rector of Stanhope £900 from those mines had contributed to the relief of the necessitous workmen? in that case the poor workmen, as well as the public, would have cause of complaint against you, but it is quite otherwise, as I acquainted you in my last letter; notwithstanding what you have done toward the relief of the miners and smelters during the time of the high price of Corn (which example neither the Lead Company, nor any other proprietor has followed that I have heard) the miners

and smelters of your works stopt the works and some of them (I believe from Rookhope) committed some depredations by seizing a cart with flour and Oat meal which they dispersed of at their own price for which (on information being obtained) I hope some of them may suffer. The agents have been down with me this day and some of the men from the several works with petitions signed by upwards of 500 of the workmen. They request that their wages may be raised and their subsistence money every two months doubled, I had a good deal of discourse with them and they were sensible that you had done more for the relief of your workmen, than any other proprietor &c and appeared ashamed of the conduct of some of the workmen; on consulting with the agents we thought it advisable at this time to increase their subsistence money one half, to continue the supply of Corn at a reduced price and as the prices of Gunpowder and Candles were considerably advanced, the advance on their Bargains was left to the consideration of the agent of the respective works, or to the whole of them on consultation; The miners left me well satisfied and if the body of them had not returned to work this morning? They promised me that the whole of them would be at work tomorrow, or next day."

This did not satisfy all of the men some still wishing for their subsistence to be doubled, Ralph Coulthard and John Kidd being named as the leaders of the disturbances aimed at seeking this. John Erasmus Blackett in his letter to Thomas Beaumont dated 17 December 1795 comments on this.⁸

"Dear Sir I met the lead stewards at Hexham on Monday and paid them £3,470 for subsistence for the workmen, with the advance that I promised them with which they are well satisfied except for a few dissatisfied turbulent men in Weardale who are using their endeavours to make the rest of the workmen insist on having double subsistence money which (as they are supplied with Corn at a reduced price) it would on no account be prudent to comply with, were you to do it their families would not benefit by it and at the time of the pay the greater part of them would have little or nothing to receive, their creditors would be clamorous and you would receive blame for the badness of the pay as they term it when they have little to receive. I enclose you one of the papers that were put up at the Smith's shop and the public houses. I have directed Mr. Emerson to acquaint them with the impropriety and unreasonableness of their demand, that it would not be complied with and should any of the men persist in it to discharge them, the Lead Co. (who have not given their men the relief that you have to yours) have already taken that method."

The miners of Weardale sent the following petition to Colonel Beaumont on the 16 August 1796.⁹

"Sheweth/ That you petitioners did in November last forward a petition to you which they believe was intercepted by J E Blackett Esq Newcastle that your petitioners have both before and since that time received various insults from your agent at Newhouse and we are we to enumerate all the advantages resulting from the works to the agent and his friends you would really be astonished suffice it to say that the drawing of the ore and strata amounts to the enormous sum of £120 per annum and the numbers of horses employed in the mines at one third less price would afford a comfortable living to several poor families of which a great many have no employment at present and not with standing the exorbitant price of Candles and Gunpowder and other Utensils and your petitioners have Candles of an inferior quality and on account of the long carriage they are much broke which renders them worse by 2/6 per Doz than those of which other miners use and we are even bereft of the wrappers in which the Barrels are contained for the safety of the powder and

convenience of carriage which wrappers are delivered in barter at 8d per stone to sellers of earthen ware. That your petitioners are very assiduous workmen and not envious of any good to any man, but at the present juncture are utterly incapable of supporting themselves and families by reason of the low prices given them for working in the lead mines, and when turn our eyes to the envious prospect of labours our Brethren in business receiving an advance of prices from the London Co so far as 35s to 40s and upwards per Bing, while ours remains parallel with the times when the necessities of life we are not half the value they are now. But at the same time a certainty remains in us that all this is unknown to you whose wisdom and goodness fills us with hopes of relief.

They therefore humbly pray that you will interpose you authority in their behalf and order them sufficient wages for their work. And one guinea per month each man for their present support a pay three months sooner than the wonted time and such treatment as Rational beings are entitled to which they have so long so often but in vain expected from the agent here with such regulations as you may think expedient. Then shall the name of Colonel Beaumont be recorded in the annals of futurity as the saviour of this oppressed and dwindling country. The weeping mothers shall suppress their tears and teach their lisping of spring to bless the preserver of their lives, while they themselves invoke the Almighty to shower down innumerable Blessings on the head of their Benefactor and long continue him in that exalted station for which Heaven has selected him to defeat the cruel Designs of unfeeling Individuals."

There is no response to this petition recorded, but the contents of a later memorial sent by Ralph Coulthard and John Kidd is strongly refuted by John E Blackett, in a letter dated 17 January 1797.¹⁰

Dear Sir I wrote to you the 15th inst. to which I refer you I am since favoured with your letter of the 14th inst. with the memorial of Ralph Coulthard and John Kidd two of the workmen who from my own knowledge have been the leaders in every disturbance amongst the workmen of Weardale mines, some of their allegations I know to be false, and I look on them to be very mischievous idle fellows and I am satisfied that if you listen to them that you will be perfectly plagued and your concern will suffer greatly. At the time of the scarcity and dearth of Corn (or rather before it took place and before any complaints were made to me by the miners; on Mr Emerson's representation I sent a considerable quantity of Corn from time to time to Weardale which the workmen were supplied with at much reduced price, at a time that the miners in the other employs in Weardale had no such advantage; As to the charge of the agent having the advantage of employing some horses, I do not see the evil arising from it, in case the charge be fair and reasonable, it has always been allowed to the agents who can do it at a lower rate than you and in case they should be deprived of this advantage, it will be reasonable that their salaries should be advanced. As to Mr Emerson having received for Horse hire £800 (or near that sum) it is a great falsity as well as having saved &c the many thousands. I have frequently informed you that Mr Emerson senior has always been esteemed a very skilful miner and an honest man I have found him to be such, his son is sober, industrious and takes a great deal of pains to inform himself of the state of those mines, he may have been other pert and not behaved properly and been a little sharp with some of the men for which I found fault with him, and he promised me to be more circumspect and cautious for the future; Algood and he have disagreed but since I discoursed with him on the occasion, he promised me that I should not hear any more complaint of the like for the future and when I saw Mr Algood at Hexham on Monday, he did not

take the least notice to me of any disagreement between them, he is I believe a quiet, sober man, but he is certainly no judge of mining, nor was ever looked on as such, nor a person capable of conducting that concern. As to Potts he is a poor ignorant fellow and is only fit to look after the washers and to deliver out the Gunpowder and Candles. Ralph Coulthard and one of the same name at Chapel, have always been at the bottom of all the mischief going forward in that quarter, the latter wrote and put up some very inflammatory papers last year at the Smith's shop; on making some enquiry I found that he was jealous of a relation of Emerson's who interfered with him in business &c. Mr Clarke the Curate of St John's Chapel was appointed by Mr Harding contrary to the interest made in the time of Sir Thomas Blackett for a Mr Harris (the nomination having been before in Sir Walter Blackett) and he has since taken the part of Coulthard and the rest of the people. I told Mr Emerson not to employ these men until they were sensible of their fault and promised to be quiet and peaceable for the future, which I am doubtful of their doing; I shall make further enquiry into these matters of complaint and if in the instances they have mentioned or in any others? I shall find that Emerson is culpable, I assure you that I shall not screen him, at the same time I strongly recommend it to you, not to listen to their idle complaints which must give encouragement to these discontented fellows and weaken the authority of your agents; Emerson senior has greatly improved the state of those mines since they have been under his management and I believe him to be a very honest man, he is perfectly acquainted with the mines of that country having been employed there all his time; his son has been brought up under him, he is sober, clever, and industrious, but is too warm and hasty, he has promised me to conduct himself with more propriety for the future, I certainly have no other object for the taking of one part in preference to the other but your interest solely."

In a later letter, it is commented that Ralph Coulthard and John Kidd were employed again and that *"that they are sensible that they have behaved ill &c."* The Beaumont company increased the subsistence money of their men. It would appear that these two men did not stop their complaints as a letter dated 21 March 1797 records the following.¹¹

"I have had a good deal of conversation with T Emerson junior respecting the complaint of Kidd and Coulthard he says that he is very devious that the matter of complaint may be fully examined into, and that he will abide by the consequence but that in case they are employed at present that neither his Father or himself can have any control whatever over the workmen, indeed I believe (from the enquiry that I have made) they are very troublesome fellows."

There is no record in the London Lead Company minutes of a strike in 1795, the only evidence of a dispute is the comment by John E. Blackett in a letter dated the 17th December 1795 to Thomas Beaumont, of men who had worked for the London Lead company being dismissed for going on strike.

The war against France in 1806 had become an economic one, Napoleon, had decided that he must stop British trade if he was to win so in 1806 he declared Britain to be in a state of blockade, and that all trade with Britain was forbidden; and that any ship trading with England or carrying English goods would be taken. Britain replied in 1807, by stating that any ship trying to enter a French port or a port of her allies would be seized. This in turn led to Napoleon declaring that any ship entering a British port would be seized when it left. To enforce the blockade on France the British insisted on stopping and searching neutral ships, this led to America declaring

war on Britain. This war took place mainly at sea and in December 1814 the Treaty of Ghent ended the war. But all these sanctions had an affect on British trade.

The dispute which occurred in the London Lead company in 1808 is referred to in a letter written by Joseph Stagg on the 19th October to Mr Masterman at the Court. The smelters at Nenthead had been doing a poor job, using a third of a bing more than at Stanhope mill to make a Fodder of lead. As a result, he turned some of the Nenthead smelters out of work and put in smelters from Stanhope mill. He also reduced the price for smelting a Fodder of lead from 10s to 8s 6d, in consequence of this the smelters left work thinking that, *"they could not be done without"*. In a letter dated the 21st October he says that the Smelters are wishing to return to work on the terms fixed by the Company.

The dispute in the Beaumont company is recorded in a letter from Joseph Dickinson to Mr Morrison dated April 1808.¹²

"... At the beginning of the Bargains at Coalcleugh I explained to the workmen what they had the right to expect from the present appearance of the times, that lead was down to £22 and if the Frenchmen could bring it lower, he would undoubtedly try, that when such times as these comes, it was the duty of every man to bear a part; we intended theirs, a very small one, only a reduction of 2/- per Bing for raising ore and dead work reduced in proportion and if they would only continue at their work an hour or two longer every day they would make up that drawback upon them to their families and then every man would be doing their duty. After that was explained to them we had no further trouble, every man took his Bargain at that reduced price cheerfully and the report of the prices were gone before me to Allenheads and Weardale and required no further explanation. ..."

There is very little evidence for a dispute in the London Lead company, between 1816 and 1817, other than that offered by Robert Bainbridge when speaking to the Kinnaird Commission in 1862. When asked if there had been any strikes he replied, *"no we know nothing of that; there has not been one since I have been in the concern, and I have been here above 20 years; there were none in the term of my predecessor, except during the two or three first years of his superintendence."*

Robert Stagg his predecessor, took over in 1816 and shortly afterwards began to make many changes and cut backs, and at Michaelmas 1816 he comments on the low wages of the men and the cost of provisions.

In his Michaelmas report of 1817, Robert Stagg comments on the general good conduct of the men. The men working for the lead company were at this time in a better position than those working for the Beaumont company, the Lead Company men receiving 40s subsistence per month, and the Beaumont men 30s.

In a resolution of 6th December 1810 the Company had established a fund for the 'Relief of maimed and decayed Workmen' employed by the Company. The men ran it as a traditional friendly society, with a subsidy from the Company. The scheme was suspended in 1815 but re-established in 1817, for Sickness, & Medical Aid, to include their wives, children and widows.

It became compulsory for all miners working for the Company to contribute to the scheme the subscription was 30/- per year. This led to a strike in December 1817 at Alston Moor, the men refusing to allow the subscription to the fund to be taken automatically from their wages at the annual reckoning. Robert was away due to poor health at this time, but the instruction by the court was that *"all workmen who do*

not immediately return to duty will be dismissed for ever from the works". The strike was suppressed and the ringleaders given up.¹³

After a boom in the price of lead between 1803 and 1809, there was a fall in price, this led the Beaumont company to reduce the subsistence paid to their men in 1816 from 30s per month to 20s, and to also reduce the amount paid per bing for the lead ore, so that the highest price per bing did not exceed 30s. This resulted in the miners sending a deputation to Colonel Beaumont to ask him for an increase in wages, and subsistence.

Year	£	Year	£
1800	22	1807	31.43
1801	21.85	1808	38.1
1802	22.86	1809	32.38
1803	32.38	1810	29.52
1804	28.57	1811	26.6
1805	37.14	1815	21.9
1806	30.48	1820	21.83

Price per Fother of Lead¹⁴

To this Martin Morrison the Chief agent was totally opposed and he also believed as the men received their subsistence in money there was no need to supply them with corn at a reduced price, in this final point he was overruled and Rye was bought for the miners. The following are two letters he wrote to Mrs Beaumont on the 26 December 1816, and 30 December 1816.¹⁵

"The enclosed papers have sent to me this morning and I hope this letter will arrive before the deputation intended to be sent to Bretton by the miners to lay before you and Colonel Beaumont their complaints and to solicit relief. The allowance of 30/- per Bing the highest price for raising ore cannot be increased without augmenting the loss already sustained in working the Weardale mines, at the present price of lead, nor will it be practicable to conduct those mines with peace and order for the future if the men are given way to on this occasion. They are at the commencement of every quarter of a year free to accept or refuse the price the agents, under due consideration of all circumstances, fix upon the different workings, nor can I think it safe to depart from this rule of conduct. I am informed that the Lead Co. allow 40/- per Bing but under such regulations. I am also informed, as are incompatible with the extended works, under the management of your agents. With respect to supplying the miners with Corn from Newcastle the subject had full consideration at the time, and from the little satisfaction which was expressed by them on former occasions, it was not deemed expedient to interfere with the various establishments and dealers in Corn that supply them, and who in receiving their monthly subsistence in Money could it was supposed purchase on equally good terms, whatever their consumption required.

"The lead Co. have of late made many new arrangements in their concerns all which I think impracticable as to any good purpose, as applied to yours; and very probably will not prove of benefit to themselves in the end.

'I propose meeting the agents on Saturday and will endeavour to obviate every reasonable complaint, if any exist, but I must recommend that when the Bargains commence, the present price for raising ore to be adhered to and as the

men are quite at liberty to decide for themselves, they may feel the consequences of their own conduct."

"I have this moment received your letter and since I had the honour of writing to you on the 26th inst. I have been waited upon by two delegates with a petition which I herewith beg to enclose, from the Weardale miners. I have told them that every consideration for their situation weighs most pressingly on the minds of their employers and with the intention of benefiting them, employment at a great loss from the low price of lead has been open to them, by which they may support their families, a blessing which in many parts of the Kingdom numbers are deprived of which happily for themselves they were in the enjoyment of. On my stating to the delegates that no additional advance to the price given for raising ore would at this time on any account be made, they said it was the determination of the miners for them to proceed to Bretton and lay their complaint before Colonel & Mrs Beaumont and also that they would not take their Bargains at the approaching letting I told them that under the present depressed state of the lead trade they could not be doing their employers a greater benefit than desisting to raise ore for three months to come and the only regret that could arise by their doing so would be the distress they themselves would feel and the impoverishment which it would produce to the Country. This observation appeared to surprise them and they asked me if I could do nothing for them in the way of Corn for that which they were supplied with was both very dear and unsound.

I expressed every readiness to adopt, with the concurrence of the mine agents, every measure to remedy this complaint that was practicable by purchasing Rye in Newcastle and supplying them with it at prime cost. This gave them satisfaction as conferring benefits and they returned home to impart the result of their mission to the miners.

"The Lead Co. by the introduction of new measures into their concerns have caused all this discontent amongst the men, they wanted they said to be put upon the same footing as the Company men were but this I told them was impossible not because they were in a worse situation for none of them I was sure would leave Colonel Beaumont's employment to go to that of the Company, but because the extension of our mines rendered the Company's mode of working highly objectionable, nor was it reasonable that the Company who posses only one working mine in Weardale should regulate Colonel Beaumont's which were so numerous.

"On Saturday I met with Mr Crawhall at Hexham and some complaints having been made of the quantity and dearness of Corn in Weardale it was determined to supply them with part money and part Corn for the months subsistence, so long as the men should desire it and from a purchase of Rye which I secured, the offer of, the agents are of opinion will prove acceptable as being cheaper and of better quality than can be obtained in the country."

The discontent amongst the miners did not stop, and following some meetings of the miners the notice below was sent to Mr Crawhall to be posted at Allenheads and Coalcleugh mines.¹⁶

Fifty Pounds Reward

Whereas diverse ill disposed persons have lately assembled in a riotous manner and attempted to seduce the Workmen at Weardale and Coalcleugh to leave their employment. This is to give notice that any endeavour to seduce the said workmen to desist from their work will be

punished to the utmost severity of the law and a reward of fifty pounds is hereby proffered to any person who will give information of such offence so as the offender or offenders may be convicted thereof.

1st January 1817.

On the 24 March Martin Morrison, the Newcastle agent wrote to George Crawhall the agent at Newhouse, Weardale.¹⁷

"I this morning received your two letters dated the 20th inst. enclosing a paper entitled "An address to the miners of Weardale." I cannot sufficiently recommend the good sense and firmness which you have displayed with interview with the mine delegates, sent by the miners to you, demanding an advance of 10/- per Bing in the price of raising ore, and to be allowed 40/- per month subsistence money instead of 30/- the sum present paid. In establishing 35/- per Bing as the highest price for raising ore, with some extra allowance for situations which in your opinion required it, I am persuaded that due consideration has been entertained towards the miners, compatible with the trust repose in us by our employer; and certainly, more than the poor and exhausted state of the mines justify.

"The advance in the price of raising ore, within the last twelve months exceeds 16 per cent upon the previous years earnings, whilst the price of lead during that period has not fluctuated more than 20/- to 30/- per fother, new and expensive trials to discover mines, were never more numerous, at a time too when the workings from their general poverty are scarcely defraying the expense they incur.

To give employment to the workmen by far too numerous for the situation is one stimulus to the exercise of your knowledge and industry, and with such intentions I consider their present conduct unreasonable, and the language contained in the "Address" mischievous and altogether unjustifiable convinced that no description of worker generally are better paid, it is my determination to adhere to what I consider our duty, and to make no alteration in the basis of the Bargains for the ensuing quarter as settled with you in Weardale. You will proceed with viewing the mines; and to give all the protection you can to such men as are willing to take Bargains and making all the use of this letter you may deem necessary."

The miners had written to T. W. Beaumont and Martin Morrison detailing their grievances, and demands.¹⁸

Honoured Sir.

"The miners of Weardale having long laboured under the great distress, have felt ourselves obliged to petition for an advance of wages. We find that our present subsistence money which is only 7/6 a week much too little to purchase the necessities of life. We have therefore petitioned for 10/- a week our requests have not yet been granted. Mr Morrison has made us an offer of 5/- per Bing more than we have had but it is too little, as those places which would have the 5/- advance cannot be worked under 10/- to enable men to make a sufficiency to support themselves and families and unless the subsistence money be advanced to 10/- a week, it will be impossible for the greatest number of us to get the necessities of life, as our credit is entirely gone.

" We have taken the liberty of enclosing the petition, which we sent to Mr Morrison and humbly beg the favour of you to interfere on our behalf. We hope that your influence will prevail on our behalf. We hope that your influence will prevail on

your worthy mother, to grant us our requests. We feel fully assured from your known generosity and benevolence, that you will do whatever is in your power to render our situations more comfortable than they have been."

Thomas Thompson John Peart

To Martin Morrison Esq

The humble petition of the miners in Weardale

"Sheweth

" That your petitioners are suffering and have long suffered the greatest distress owing to the pressure of the times, and the low price given for raising ore this they have endured with great patience and fortitude in expectation of better times. We have continued working a long time confiding in Lady Beaumont's promise that our wages shall be advanced as soon as the price of lead advanced. Lead has considerably advanced since that period, but we have only received five shillings since per Bing and that only for the poorest mine, great number of us are not making our subsistence money and have been under the necessity of seeking relief, upwards of 400 of us (including their families) are on the parish. Mr Crawhall says he has not power to give more at present, our strength and spirits are gone, numbers of us nearly without food and raiment suffering extreme poverty we feel ourselves obliged from these distressing circumstances to humbly request that you will have the goodness to advance the price of raising ore not less than 10/- per Bing and other work in proportion, in order to enable men to make 15/- or 16/- per week and to advance our subsistence money to 40/- per month. From your wonted goodness and generosity, we humbly hope you will grant our reasonable request of your petitioners we ever pray."

The following series of letters describe well the way in which the dispute developed and was finally settled.¹⁹

The Rev William Wilson Newhouse, Weardale 30th September 1818

Wolsingham

"Sir I beg to inform you that the men still continue off work, notwithstanding every exertion on the part of the agents has been tried to recall them to their duty and to give a peaceable direction to their minds which I regret to say appears to be instigated to passion and I fear violence by wicked council. Liberal offers of an increase of wages in order to leave no possible ground open for complaint, and to preserve the peace of the country have been made to the men and certainly far beyond what the general poverty of the mines justify, but their demands are to exorbitant and directed with an improper spirit that if yielded to, an end to all subordination would be the consequence.

Whereas the mines have been commonly productive the men have earned reasonable and good wages, but the misfortune in that the population of the district is too extensive for the mines, altho there never was a period when more new and expensive trials were made in Weardale than at this time, to discover mines and to afford employment to its numerous inhabitants.

"I am inclined to think the majority of the men are well disposed and anxious to continue their work, but are prevented and intimidated by threats of violence of the turbulent and ill disposed.

"I think it my duty to give you, as a magistrate this information."

I am respectfully

George Crawhall

Mrs Beaumont Newcastle 2nd October 1818

Bretton

"Madam Since I had the honour of last addressing a letter to you, I have been in Weardale whether I went at the solicitation of George Crawhall who became alarmed by the menacing tumultuous proceedings, of the largest assemblage of miners ever before seen there. When I arrived, it was intimated to the miners, that I was at Newhouse and ready to hear any representation they had to make, after some hesitation whether they would come or not, first saying I might come to them if I had a proposition to make, this however when they understood I was about to leave the place they gave up, and six of the men waited upon me. They said, all they had to state was to require 10/- per Bing advance and 40/- per month subsistence and that if it was not given them, the men would not go back to work, having entered into a written engagement, one and all to abide by that determination. I told them at once that 40/- per month would never be acceded to, but that with the intention of not affording them the smallest pretext for complaint and to preserve the peace of the district, I would give now the advance of 5/- per Bing which I meditated to give at the commencement of the new year, provided they returned peaceably to their work.

This proposition being communicated to the body of the miners, who insisted on upon having their own terms, I prepared to come away, first informing the deputation they must be aware, that they were meeting illegally and cognisable to the laws of their country and that as what I had now proposed was solely for their good and upon my responsibility. It was only left to me openly to announce, that as many as were desirous and did actually return to their work every protection would be given to them, that the civil power would offered. (afford?) I then prepared a letter a copy of which is enclosed, for George Crawhall's signature to the Rev'd W Wilson a magistrate in the event of the men not returning to work.

"To attempt more will answer no good purpose, to recall the men to their duty, and after the answer which a deputation received from W.B. Beaumont of his determination not to interfere while the men discontinue their work. I am not without hopes that they will soon be sensible of their error and return to work." MM

Mr G Crawhall Newcastle 9th October 1818

Newhouse

"... In the event of the men being so misguided as to proceed to the commitment of injury to the property of their employers it must fall upon the county and of course themselves to repair the damage that is done, besides the punishment which the law inflicts upon the perpetrators of injury, on the whole your communication impresses me with the opinion that the men will return to work soon and that an apparent indifference on your part to their proceedings may have good effect."

I am &c MM

Thomas Wentworth Beaumont Esq M.P. Newcastle 15th October 1818

Hexham Abbey

"The miners having returned to work, and the last quarter expired for which the ore Bargains were taken. It became necessary, to enter into a new agreement with them for the present quarter ending with the year. In consequence Mr George Crawhall came down yesterday from Weardale to fix upon the highest price per Bing proper to be given for raising ore, and we determined that an advance of 5/- per Bing on the prime price of 35/- should be offered for this and the following quarter; but that no alteration in the subsistence or lent money on account of the yearly earnings could be made; and which is to be continued after the rate of 30/- per man per month as heretofore. I take the liberty of making this communication to you, in the event of the workmen continuing to expect their own unreasonable demands to be complied with, and again applying to you for that purpose."

I am &c MM

W.B. Beaumont Esq Newcastle 24th October 1818

Hexham

"Sir I am this morning honoured with your letter of Thursday night, and at the same time received the account of proceedings of the Weardale miners at Allenheads and Coalcleugh. The most direct method would have been for Mr Crawhall to have laid "information" against George Robinson and Thomas Stephenson before Mr Richmond who is a magistrate and who was with him at Hexham on Thursday in this opinion I have thought it best, and Mr Williamson coincides in the opinion, to put at the mines the enclosed Hand Bill, and if it does not produce the effect of making the men desist from obstructing those who inclined to work, the information then can be laid against Robinson and Stephenson; which as it would place Mr Crawhall much alone to inform, in a situation hazardous to his safety. I would recommend a magistrate (if he could be prevailed upon) to receive at Allenheads the deposition and of other persons who witnessed the illegal proceedings. Mr Faber, the Rev'd W Wilson and Doctor Fenwick all Durham magistrates have been acquainted with the occurrences in Weardale, but I am unacquainted with any active and firm who will without an actual information being laid and I fear procuring a sufficient number of special constables to act with effect in Weardale is impracticable. I trust the Hand Bill may produce the desired effect and render unnecessary more rigorous measures; at all events the trial, if it fails will not produce much delay."

I have the honour to be &c

MM

Mr George Crawhall Newcastle 26th October 1818

Weardale

"Colonel Beaumont having taken into consideration the late illegal and disgraceful conduct of the workmen in Weardale, to whom under the late disastrous circumstances of the times, he has authorised work to be given to every extent possible, far beyond what the state of the mines prudently warranted, feels justly offended and although he is inclined to believe the greatest part of the men have been influenced in their late behaviour, by some evil disposed persons among them, he is willing to pass over the offence in the hope that similar dreadful scenes will never occur again, yet it is with the exception of those persons who have been the

chief instigators in the late transactions who are not to be employed again in his works whenever you can discover or identify their persons."

I am &c MM

Mr Morrison Weardale April 1819

"The mines in general have been very poor this quarter and from the loss of time when the workmen struck for an advance of prices, and the foul air setting into a part of the workings while they were off work, which continued a month before it could be extracted to get regularly forward, has caused this quarters produce to be short, but I am happy to inform you a part of the workings are doing better. ..."

George Crawhall

¹ Letter book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company Northumberland Record Office, NRO 672/E/1E/2.

² Newcastle Courant 4 December 1756. Newcastle Central Library, Local History Department.

³ Letter Book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/1E/2.

⁴ Newspaper Article in the Bell Collection January 1854. Newcastle Central Library Local History Department.

⁵ Letter Book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/1E/2

⁶ Northumberland Record Office NRO ZBL 226

⁷ Letter Book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/1E/5.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/CO/15.

¹⁰ Letter Book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/1E/5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/CO/15.

¹³ General Index Book of the Gov. Co. Page 49

¹⁴ Letter Book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office 672/E/1E/5

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Letter Book of the Blackett Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/1E/6.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 2

THE 1849 STRIKE

The strike of 1849 at Allenheads had its origins in changes that were made in 1846, these were introduced by Thomas Sopwith the Chief Agent of the Beaumont company, a post he had taken up on the 1 July 1845.

In September of 1845 Thomas Sopwith received a deputation from the Allendale miners requesting an increase in their subsistence payments of 30s per month, and later he received a similar request from the Weardale miners. The difficulty in raising the subsistence money as far as the company was concerned was that it would increase the amount of arrears (arrears were the amount of money owed to the company by a miner, who had earned less in wages than that given in monthly subsistence) that miners would have, this was a particular problem in Weardale where the amount of arrears owed was high.

To help solve this difficulty Sopwith introduced the percent system. This system meant that any miner who earned more than 15s per week would pay 10% of the amount over this 15s back to the company. So a miner earning 25s per week would pay 1s towards paying off the arrears of those not fortunate enough to earn sufficient to cover their subsistence money. The system guaranteed that anyone in arrears would only be liable for half the arrears, which would be carried over to the following year. The other half of his arrears would be paid by the 10% contribution of his colleagues who earned over 15s per week, if these payments did not cover the costs, then the company paid the difference. For example in June of 1846, the arrears owed by the men of Allenheads was £156 2s 10d, of this amount the company paid £76 4s 5d.¹

The miners accepted this system, and their subsistence money was increased from 30s to 40s per month. With this system in place and the increase in subsistence, it was apparent that the company thought that there could be a tendency for the miners not to be so concerned about having to work so hard to make their wages. This is made clear by statements made by Sopwith in his "Address to The Miners and Other Workmen employed in Mr Beaumont's Mines" which was given to all the men in 1846.²

"I am satisfied, however, that those miners who are receiving forty shillings a week will feel themselves bound in honour to make every exertion to realise that amount. They will feel it as a duty to Mr Beaumont, who has at once granted their request, and they will feel it as a duty not to saddle their fellow workmen with the payment of arrears which due exertion on their part might have prevented."

In order to ensure that arrears did not increase the number of days and hours the men were expected to work was made very clear.

"It is therefore to be clearly understood, that the advance of forty shillings has reference to actual work performed during five days of eight hours each; that is to say forty hours per week, or one hundred and sixty hours per month, which at three pence per hour, amounts to forty shillings per month, the sum now to be advanced."

The miners accepted these terms in 1846, but it soon became apparent to Sopwith that many miners were not keeping to their side of the bargain, and this to him was a serious breach of trust. To counter this in October of 1848 he appointed agents to record the times that the men entered and left the mines. The men took objection to this, and complained to Sopwith, about the conduct of the agents at Allenheads, whom

they blamed for carrying out Thomas Sopwith's orders with regard to time keeping in an excessive manner. Thomas Sopwith's diary records the build up to the strike:³

28 October 1848 *"A deputation of miners waited upon me headed by Joseph Heslop. ... I considered that the object of their mission viz. the removal of Messrs. William and John Curry from their position as Inspectors of the mines at Allenheads was one which I would not entertain and as soon as their object was apparent I declined any conversation there on."*

30 October 1848 *"I received a memorial from the miners."*

31 October 1848 *"I went to the office at 9am and remained till 4. I spoke at great length to Thomas Dargue on the discreditable conduct of the miners. In the evening I wrote a full account of what had occurred to Mr J. G. Atkinson."*

15 November 1848 *"My diaries for the remainder of this and the following week contain a daily record of my occupations at Allenheads and other parts of the mining district relating entirely to the business of the mines and to the unwillingness of the Allenheads miners to observe the stipulation of their Bargains to work eight hours per shift."*

9 December 1848 *"I concluded a very diligent investigation of various complaints by miners against the sub agents."*

13 December 1848 *"Revised all the evidence taken before me relating to charges against William and John Curry."*

The strike that was about to take place was ill considered, Sopwith had been instructed by T.W. Beaumont to make improvements to the mining concern, so as to increase its profitability. It was apparent to Sopwith that there were more men working at Allenheads than were needed, and so he was planning to reduce the work force.

T. W. Beaumont himself was seriously ill, and died 20 December 1848, leaving his estate to his son Wentworth Blackett Beaumont, who had not reached his majority (he became 21 years of age in 1850). This left the miners in a very weak bargaining position, all major decisions being taken by Thomas Sopwith, and any reduction in the work force a benefit to the company. The strike was further undermined by the fact that the miners in the other districts did not support the strike so the company continued to produce lead, so there was no financial pressure on the company to settle.

We can follow the strike from Sopwith's point of view from his journal entries, which were written up from his diary in 1877.⁴

1 January 1849 *"The miners attended but did not (with 3 exceptions) take bargains ... This was the commencement of what was virtually a strike, although strictly speaking it took the form of a refusal to enter into a new contract for the first quarter of the year. This of course was perfectly within the right of the miners as free agents whether to work or not. ... According to the quarterly contract or Bargain each miner was required to work five eight-hour shifts in each week. This was not a matter of mere custom or of general understanding but an express stipulation in writing distinctly inserted in every contract and read along with the other conditions before the contract was signed on behalf of each person or partnership by one of their number. This was the practice long before I entered on the agency and I continue it without alteration. The entrance to the mines or rather I should say one of the principle entrances being in view from my office window I had constant proof that instead of working 8 hours many miners only worked 6 or 7 hours and this had been the subject of strong and often repeated*

remonstrations on the part of myself and Inspectors. Clocks and watches were often mentioned in excuse and to remedy this a large public clock striking the hours was put up and its tones could be heard over all the district in which the Allenheads miners resided. As this had no effect and remonstrations and reproof being alike unavailing I appointed timekeepers and the data collected by them proved how much the necessity for reform existed.

“When on the 1st of January the miners declined to take any Bargains they were acting upon the advice of some ill disposed men of whom a miner named Joseph Heslop was the chief. He had been the leader in making some requests to me when I first entered on my duties and as these requests were reasonable they were granted with mutual advantage to the employer and employed. This success together with the position of local preacher in the Primitive Methodist Community and considerable natural talents much tact and unbounded self confidence had caused him to be looked up to as a wise and powerful guide by his fellow miners and the results showed how great was his influence over them.

“Now it so happened that at this time (and for some time previously) there were many more miners at Allenheads than were required by the condition of the mines. This I had intimated and indeed the fact was well known to the miners themselves. To about a dozen of them I had sent notice that their services would not be required of these Joseph Heslop was one and the others were of similar local influence by acting as local preachers and by a superior degree of intelligence which however was not in harmony with the strict regulations on the question of time. ...”

12 January 1849 *“This evening a deputation of three of the miners waited upon me (by pre arrangement) at my house. Their object was to discuss the subject of differences, which at this time separated me from the body of the workmen. ... they came very much in the character of peacemakers and certainly in that view I was most favourably disposed to meet them. I understood them to say that the combined body of miners had entered into some form of pledge from which they could only be relieved by my making some concession however trifling that concession might be. The hours of work only were brought forward and upon that I declared my inability to make any concession however small. I justified my resolution on this point not only because of the reasonableness of the arrangement but because the workmen had by a previous deputation expressed in writing their entire approval. ...*

“On the following day Robert Watson (also a shopkeeper) and his two companion delegates met their constituents the general body of miners. They stated their entire agreement with me and they returned to work and became “Black legs” or traitors to their fellow workmen. This declaration by the delegates was made on the 13 January and the strike continued another 16 weeks within a day or two namely until 3 May. “

22 March 1849 *“I observed an assemblage of miners at the entrance of the ‘Horse Track’ or foot way into the mines. On going to them I found that they desired to have their working implements out of the mine in order that they might thus be in a condition to go and seek employment in other mines. These tools partly belong to the owner of the mines and partly to the miners (who pay for them by instalments) but overlooking any claim on the part of the owner I at once agreed to consider the working tools as the property of the miners and I gave leave accordingly from them to have them.”*

3 May 1849 *"I observed several groups of miners on the road near the office. I went out and spoke to them. They said they had come to take their bargains!! And this I said they could do ... And this after 4 months and 3 days the strike came to an end."*

What is not made clear in these records is that a settlement of sorts had been reached in November 1848. The miners deputation met Mr J. G. Atkinson, and it was agreed that the miners would sign a declaration stating that they would work 8 hours per day in their place of work, on the understanding that the "Watchers" would be removed and an independent investigation into the miners complaints would be carried out by Mr J. Rodham, of Newhouses and Mr J. Nevin, of Coalcleugh. The time keepers were removed for one week, but after that time five agents instead of the previous two were employed in time keeping, these men being armed with pistols, a staff, and handcuffs. Instead of an independent inquiry, Sopwith carried out the inquiry himself as his journals recorded, and the men dismissed in November were never to get their jobs back, and some were evicted from their homes.

In order to follow the strike and the emotions of those involved the letters that the miners and Thomas Sopwith sent to the Newcastle Guardian are given below.

24th March 1849⁵

"GENTLEMEN, The recent proceedings relative to the unfortunate dispute between ourselves and our masters compel us, through the medium of your impartial journal to appeal to the public on the injustice and oppression to which we have been, and still are, subjected. We do this with the utmost reluctance, but seeing that all available avenues of private communication have been closed against us, and not even the liberty of a hearing granted us, we are compelled to adopt this course as our last resort; and we trust that the decision of a discerning public, whose frown is ever the most potent weapon against the tyranny and injustice, we will so influence the minds of our oppressors as to lead them to restore us to the privileges of which we have been unjustly deprived.

"Our case may be briefly stated. The miners of Allenheads have, from time immemorial, enjoyed a character for intelligence and sobriety, industry and skill, which without egotism, we may claim to be unequalled. Confirmations are abundant, we need but to refer to the oft-repeated evidence of magistrates, that felonies and misdemeanours are unknown amongst them and to the fact that, for ages, the most perfect unanimity and cordiality have existed between their masters and themselves. And had we their descendants been guilty of any acts that would tarnish this fair fame, we would not have presumed to lay our case before our present tribunal. Thus did the interests of ourselves and our masters "flow in a clear united stream, by strife unruffled," till the appointment of T. Sopwith Esq., to the post of Chief Agent, when the two under agents or inspectors, Messrs. William and John Curry began gradually to exercise powers which they hitherto not possessed, to invade the acknowledged privileges of the men, and to seize every opportunity of causing annoyance. This state of discontent was brought to a crisis in October last by the establishment of staff watchers, to take down the hour each man entered and left the mine, and to stop him in cases where he was either a few minutes too soon or too late. Such a proceeding could not be of any practical utility, in as much as each man is paid according to the amount of work he performs, and not according to the time he is at work. Eight hours per day is indeed, the recognised standard of a days work, but it sometimes happens that that a set of men, by dint of sagacity, accomplish a piece of work in six hours, which a less ingenious set would require eight hours to complete, and in this case the

former are not only entitled in justice to be released, but are, by the impurity of the air, by the blasting, compelled to retire. In short, the time test could only be meant as a vexatious invasion of our liberty, or to furnish data on which to found some future grinding exaction. On the 28th of October a meeting of the miners was held to consider and trace, if possible, the origin of this unprecedented treatment, and to adopt means for its removal. From all the evidence adduced, the charges seemed to rest on the Inspectors; a resolution was accordingly drawn up praying for their removal, and a deputation appointed to wait upon Mr Sopwith to represent the sentiments of the meeting. Mr S refused to hear any verbal representations but expressed himself willing to receive their sentiments in writing. The wishes of the meeting were accordingly drawn up in the form of a memorial, and forwarded to him on the second day following. To this memorial no answer was returned, nor was any inquiry made into the truth or falsity of the charges made against the inspectors; but from that time it was evident from his conduct that he had already settled the point in his own mind. He immediately ordered his name to be withdrawn from the Loyal Miner's Association, declaring that he would not be identified with such a mobbish body; he designated the miners with all manner of opprobrious epithets, as ignorant, indiscreet, Irish ruffians, mobs, &c., and even went so far in his rage as to obtain through the Land agent, the immediate discharge from their houses of four of the deputation. He also subsequently discharged from their employment fourteen who had the hardihood to prefer their charges against the Inspectors. Thus matters continued, ourselves still subject to the insolent censorship of the Inspectors, who became increasingly haughty from their supposed victory over us, till the 17th of November, when Mr Atkinson himself, the Chief Commissioner of our lately deceased and lamented master, granted us an interview. The delegation waited upon him, and were received with the utmost courtesy. They, in the name of the miners, and in the presence of Mr Sopwith and the accused stated the several charges against the Inspectors. And it was further stated by the delegates that the men making the charges were ready to support them whenever they might be called upon. Eight hours were occupied in the discussion of the case, a time sufficient to have produced the witnesses and argued the position fully at once, but the results were, that promises were given to submit the case to the investigation and decision of Mr Jonathan Rodham, of Newhouses, and Mr John Nevin, of Coalcleugh, two duly qualified, and at the same time, disinterested individuals, and if the charges were found to exist, to remove the accused individuals. These conditions being acceded to, the deputation, with a view of making corresponding concessions on their part, agreed to the signing of a document in which they acknowledged first the rashness and indiscretion of calling a meeting without first asking the permission of Mr Sopwith, and secondly, agreeing to work for eight hours per day "in place," if that was found to be accordant with general usage. The promises here made were confirmed by Mr Sopwith next morning in a speech, wherein he gave us to understand that the "spy system" should be abolished, and that, if our liberties and privileges were not augmented, they should at any rate not be reduced. These conditions were observed for one week; but on the following Monday, instead of the usual two, five time takers were present book in hand, and noting the hours of our arrival and departure; together with a constable duly armed with staff, pistols and handcuffs. And thus it continued till Christmas. Meanwhile the charges we had preferred were to be examined, and never perhaps was a more inquisitorial proceeding adopted. Instead of an open investigation before Messrs. Rodham and Nevin, as had been agreed upon, Mr Sopwith conducted the inquiry himself, in private, the men were admitted one by one, and after giving their plain unvarnished tale, they were subjected to an inquisition of mingled abuse and

scrutiny which, in the majority of cases, quite embarrassed them. This of course was made a pretext for declaring the charges to be unfounded, but the feelings with which a man, and particularly a miner, confronts the master from whom he is receiving his daily bread can be too easily appreciated by the thoughtful to admit the justice of a decision gained by such means. Furthermore we knew that Mr Sopwith had decided before ever he heard the case, and we could therefore have little confidence in his investigation. Seeing that no impartiality could be guaranteed to us in this way, another requisition was forwarded, praying a meeting on the 16th December, at which Mr Atkinson, Mr Rodham, and Mr Nevin might also be present. Answer was returned from the office that such a meeting should be granted; but conceive our surprise at seeing our friend Mr Sopwith, with praiseworthy pertinacity, occupying the chair, and supported right and left, by nobody. After a restriction that the old charges should not be entered upon (though that was the real object of the meeting) some minor topics were introduced, but the chairman soon found a pretext for dissolving the meeting, and thus nothing was accomplished. At the opening of the year, when one of the quarterly agreements is entered upon, none of the 400 men (except four, and these from peculiar circumstances) would take bargains until the questions in dispute were settled. All attempts at settlement were then refused, except on the terms of unqualified submission; letters and memorials have since been treated as waste paper, and audiences and investigations blankly refused, and the consequence is that none have yet returned to work.

“Our charges the are these. We accuse the Messrs. Curry of abusive language, altogether inconsistent with the character of gentlemen, of assumptions of power and vexatious restrictions, equally inconsistent with the powers delegated to them, and which, so far as we can see could only have their origin in ignorance and presumption. If they should attempt to justify themselves by reference to their long standing in their present capacity, the argument is easily refuted by a reference to circumstances. During the late agency of Mr Crawhall, they acted in their proper positions as subordinates, Mr C., being himself a man thoroughly versant in the working of mines; but under the management of Mr Sopwith, who, though an excellent engineer, is yet not practically conversant with the practises of working they have attained a position which was before occupied by the better judgement of their master, and in the inflation of their pride as masters, have forgot their duties as men.

“Our charges against Mr Sopwith are.

1st, That he allowed his judgement to decide before the case had been gone into, that in appealing to him as a judge he delivered his verdict before he heard a single witness; and 2ndly, That he did not keep his promise in the appointment of impartial judges, and in the preservation of our privileges and rights. We will dispense here with his inconsistencies in condemning the course we have pursued, and at the same time lauding the same course in 1846, and in describing us as Irish and ruffians on one day, and then closely afterwards complimenting our intelligence and peaceable dispositions. We would however, be happy to persuade ourselves that his later tyrannic acts resulted rather from the difficulties and vexations that followed his first false step (in prejudging this dispute), than from any preconcerted attempts to oppress us.

“Mr Atkinson we exonerate from all participation in the matter. Indeed, from his uniform politeness, condescension, and benevolence, and particularly from the promises given in his presence for a speedy and satisfactory reconciliation, we have

every reason to believe that, but from misrepresentations of those around him, he would have been a zealous seconder of our rights.

"Thus rests the case at present. We have been lying idle for eight weeks; we are suffering privation and hunger; some of us reduced to the necessity of begging our bread; and but for the benevolence of several gentlemen who understand our real position, and ready to succour the oppressed have generously aided us, we should have been in a still more miserable condition. We have taken all the means which our best wisdom could suggest to come to an amicable agreement, on principles of justice and mutual satisfaction; but in vain. We are ready to be servants but refuse to be slaves! And rather than submit to the tyranny attempted to be exercised over us, and while America and Australia spread their bosoms to welcome the oppressed, we are ready to brave the perils of the Atlantic or Pacific. We are aware that it may be said, "a man has a right to do what he will with his own;" but we would bid such remember that property has its duties as well as its rights, and we would ask, is it any part of Christianity, of humanity, or of common justice, first to attempt to reduce those whom providence has placed beneath us, to a state of slavery, and then when they refuse submission to such galling bonds, to endeavour to reduce them to starvation! We trow not!

"We have given a plain and impartial statement of the case. If in the eye of the general reader it may seem tangled and capable of misconstruction, we would but refer him to our repeated demands for investigation, and further ask him if it is likely that we would withdraw ourselves the means of subsistence on account of grievance which, in reality, did not exist. All private means of investigation have failed; we now publicly call upon our oppressors to justify themselves or to prove our injustice.

"We have many other correlative and corroborative charges, as the withholding of "subsistence money" when fairly and honestly earned, the exaction of "centage money" without any account being rendered, the deducting of fifty four or fifty six weeks subsistence money for this year, &c., but, for the present we will leave these till our opponents have answered the main charges already made, and till the public have answered the main charges already made, and till the public have proclaimed a verdict on the side of justice and truth."

We are, gentlemen, yours &c.,

THE ALLENHEADS MINERS Allenheads, March 20, 1849.

31 March 1849⁶

"Gentlemen, I observe in your paper of this day a communication signed "The Allenheads Miners," and in deference to public opinion, to which these parties appeal, I beg to offer, in as brief form as the subject will admit, the following observations in reply: -

"The subsistence of the alleged grievances amounts simply to this - That, in the first place, I took measures to ascertain the hours of work; and in the second, that I refused to comply with an arbitrary and unreasonable demand for the dismissal of two of my under agents.

"These two points comprise the whole subject matter in which the disputes originate, and they fortunately admit of a very plain and simple explanation.

"In 1845, when I entered on the agency of these mines, I was aware that there existed at Allenheads what I have usually called a laxity as regards time, and further

the experience confirmed me in the opinion that the miners in Weardale and in West Allendale displayed a creditable industry in this respect, which I was anxious to see more generally followed at Allenheads. I made frequent representations to the workmen on the subject and my correspondence with the late Mr Beaumont and Mr Atkinson can be referred to, to demonstrate, if it were necessary, the long continued and earnest efforts I made to induce greater regularity. An application was made for an advance of 2s 6d per week, which was granted on the express condition that the miners should work five eight hour shifts per week - i.e., eight hours a day for five days in the week. This was no new rule. It was the express stipulation of their quarterly bargains, and for many years before I came, such was not only the clear understanding, but the express written terms of their agreements. No alteration whatever has been made in this rule since I came, and the bargains, which were offered on The 1st of January last, were in the self-same words they had always been. Whenever I have spoken to any of the miners on the subject of their short time, I was always met by some special excuse, such as the difference in time by their house clocks, &c. To remedy this, a public clock was got, and at length, seeing that no other means would suffice, and knowing that from the exhausted state of the mines, a reduction of workmen for a time would probably be inevitable, I instructed Messrs. Wm. and John Curry to take an account of the hours of work, which was done by recording the time each miner entered and came out.

“To those not conversant with mining (in which number, by the way, I am myself included by the anonymous compiler of the miner’s document), it may be necessary to explain that the piece work contracts or bargains in lead mines have reference to time; and the time which usually forms the basis of such contracts is eight hours of fair and skilful labour, unless in special cases where from wetness, defective ventilation, or other cause a liberal allowance is made. This opinion can be confirmed by the judgement and practice of the most experienced miners in this Kingdom. The whole matter in dispute as regards this point, therefore, is that the Allenheads miners have entered into threefold obligation to observe it. The tyranny and oppression of which they now complain is simply that I wish them to fulfil this condition.

“I call it a threefold obligation, because in the first place, they have, every man of them, for many years past, both before and after I came, taken and signed written bargains upon the express condition of working five eight hour shifts per week. Such is, in fact, the long established practice of these mines, and I consider that I have just cause of complaint on behalf of my employers, that the condition, though accepted by the miners, is not even attempted to be fulfilled by them.

“This subject further became a special matter of agreement in 1846, and, in order that none of them might plead ignorance of such condition, it was printed and placed in the hands of every miner, as a condition annexed to the advance of their subsistence money (i.e. part wages paid on account,) from 7s 6d to 10s per week, as follows: -

“If three pence per hour is paid for subsistence, it would be unreasonable in those who do not work to expect payment at that rate. It is, therefore, to be clearly understood that the advance of forty shillings has reference to actual work performed during the five days of eight hours each; that is to say, forty hours per week, or one hundred and sixty hours per month, which, at three pence an hour, amounts to forty shillings per month, the sum now to be advanced.”

“Surely the English language, and the plain common sense of Englishmen, do not admit of the matter of business being made plainer than this.

“And in the third place, not only the deputation, but the whole body of miners, signed the following agreement, on or soon after the 17th November last: -

“We the undersigned Miners, &c., in the employment of Thomas Wentworth Beaumont, Esquire, do hereby express our opinion that the meeting, on the 28th October last, was an ill judged and improper proceeding, and we are sorry that such a meeting was held without any previous intimation of real or supposed grievances being made to Mr Sopwith, who has, at all times, been ready to receive any communication made in a proper and respectful manner. In consideration of the Lent Money being 40s per month, we agree to fulfil the terms on which such advance was made, and to work the hours named in the bargain, viz., five eight hour shifts per week of actual work in place, except only in such cases as shall be allowed in writing by Mr Sopwith, or by the Mine Inspectors authorised by him.”

“The Watching,” as the miners call it, or the taking account of time, was discontinued on the presumption that, at all events, an approximation to more exact time would be made. After a week had elapsed, it was apparent that no improvement was attempted, and the account was therefore resumed and kept until the expiration of their bargains on the 30th December. The time kept by the miners is, therefore on record, and proves that they signed the agreement and took the 40s, with apparently, a fixed intention not to fulfil the express obligation on which the sum was paid.

“On the 1st January last I offered them their bargains. They inquired, “On what terms?” I said “On the same terms they have always been offered; there is no alteration; all I require is that if you accept these terms you will act upon them.” It was evident, from their almost unanimous refusal that they had entered into a combination to endeavour to retain a privilege of working what hours they pleased, and to compel me to acquiesce therein by a general cessation of work.

“As regards the second ground of complaint, viz., that I refused to discharge Messrs. W. and J. Curry, I have to observe, that ever since I came to Allenheads I have given every one who applied to me an immediate, respectful, and attentive hearing. On the 28th October a deputation of five miners came to Allenheads, accompanied by a large body of men, about 260 in number, sent by a meeting to request, not an investigation into any alleged cause of complaint, but the dismissal of the two under agents, and the principal spokesman stated that there would be no confidence between the workmen and myself so long as these agents remained. This was a little more peremptory than I thought was becoming, and I said, “I am much surprised and dissatisfied at your proceedings. I strongly recommend to you never to assemble large bodies of miners to discuss grievances without first speaking to me on the subject. You blame the Currys for the watching, whereas it is my own act, and they have merely fulfilled my written instructions. I will entertain no such application, but if you like to make a written statement it shall be forwarded to Mr Beaumont, through Mr Atkinson (who was at that time with Mr Beaumont at Bretton).” Two days after, I received a memorial, which I immediately forwarded, and Mr Atkinson devoted a whole day to the hearing of complaints by the delegates. They handed a list of persons said to have been aggrieved, and on questioning these persons, thirty in number, it was found that two only had made any statement at the meeting, and these two complained only of Messrs. Curry having exacted compliance with the express terms of their bargains entered into, in the one case only eight, and in the other only twelve days

previously to the meeting. Several of the parties not only made no complaint, but actually bore the highest testimony to the fair dealing and integrity of the Messrs. Curry. Indeed it is difficult to conceive anything more atrocious than the proceedings got up against these two agents, and the result was a consultation with Mr Beaumont's solicitors, whether or not the parties were open to prosecution for a conspiracy. Mr Atkinson, whose kind feelings and attentive consideration of every matter in which the miners are concerned are well known, denounced the conduct of the leading parties in these proceedings as infamous; and by that name and no other do I denounce the tissue of calumnies and misrepresentations which, by some kind and able penman, have been clothed in so plausible a shape as may, perhaps, gain a share of public sympathy, but which will vanish on a full investigation of the facts.

"It is, I again repeat, a fortunate circumstance that every matter in which I am concerned as regards this combination has been reduced to writing. The whole of the details would be much too voluminous for publication, but I have no doubt that the permission of my employers may be obtained to their being submitted to any gentleman of high position, and of experience in mining matters. To no one could such questions be submitted with greater propriety than to the much respected Chairman of the Magistrates for this division of the County, in as much as he not only possesses an intimate local knowledge of the district and lead mining concerns, but his generous feeling is well known to be such as would at once repel any attempt at oppression or injustice. As to my own judgement, ability in mining, fair dealing or desire to promote the welfare of the working classes, I say nothing; I leave that to others; I am satisfied with a good conscience, a happy mind, and the reasonable share of success which has rewarded a life of patient industry. I consider the minds of the great bulk of the Allenheads miners to be inflamed by the ignorant and malicious conduct of a few demagogues, towards whom, on the recommendation of Mr Atkinson, I used the authority vested in me, to dispense with their future services. It is not my intention to amuse the public by continuing a paper war, or noticing vague accusations of abuse. Messrs. W. and J. Curry have shown not only great ability, but highly commendable spirit, in the discharge of their laborious and responsible duties. They will not be dismissed; and whenever the miners of Allenheads learn to imitate the industry and good order which prevails amongst by far the greater number of workmen under my charge, they will find that I aim only at what is absolutely essential for their own welfare; and that neither anonymous charges, nor the most discreditable acts which have lately been committed by some of the miners of this dale, will deter me from pursuing the path of duty, alike to the employer and the employed."

T. Sopwith

7th April 1849⁷

"Gentlemen, We are extremely glad that Mr Sopwith has, in your last, undertaken a vindication of himself and his colleagues, against the charges which we, in a previous number, preferred against them, as his reply itself goes far to prove the truth of our statements, which the following very simple expedient will illustrate. On the one hand we place our charges against him, and on the other those to which he replies.

We said "Our charges against Mr Sopwith are 1st.

That he allowed his judgment to decide before the case had been gone into, that in appealing to him as a judge he delivered his verdict before he had heard a single witness.

And secondly. That he did not keep his promise in the appointment of impartial judges, and in the preservation of our privileges and rights.

Mr Sopwith, as the foundation of his letter, says (and the italics are his own) "*That the subsistence of the alleged grievances amounts simply to this, that I took measures to ascertain the hours of work; and in the second, that I refused to comply with an arbitrary and unreasonable demand for the dismissal of two of my under*

"The juxtaposition will seem somewhat amusing to the general reader, and cannot we think, fail to be convincing to the searchers of the truth. Mr Sopwith doubtless intended it as a dextrous manoeuvre to lead the reader from the real ground of dispute, and possibly, at first sight he may succeed; but placing the two causes side by side, it certainly appears a somewhat "clumsy dexterity." If he could relieve himself from our charges, why did he not do so? The inference is irresistible. The whole of his letter being based on these two points, our charges stand in all their original force against him, without even a denial of their truth, much less a proof of their fallacy. We might therefore, dismiss the whole letter with this signal self-refutation; but as he has descended into a variety of statements, we will condescend to follow him, and to encounter him again upon his own grounds.

"He first refers to the time question, which he says is the substance of the alleged grievances. We beg, however, to state that there were "alleged grievances" long before he meddled with the time question. This latter was only on October last; whereas, in 1847, he will remember it was only by the strenuous efforts of one of those whom he now denominates "demagogues" that a public burning of his books was prevented. The cause of this demonstration was not on account of the time question, nor yet because he refused to dismiss his under agents. When in 1845, he entered upon the agency of these mines, his ingratiating promises fell around as thick as vernal leaves; but when in subsequent years, we came to seek fruit thereon we were miserably disappointed and soon learnt that

*"Where leaves in most profusion hang,
Look there for the smallest fruit."*

"It was therefore, not the time question alone that originated our quarrel, but as it is the subject that brought it to crisis and moreover forms one of the chief features of his letter, we will confine ourselves to it alone. And here again we must expose one of his "artful dodges," in attempting to lead the reader away from the real subject of dispute. We admit that we were at difference with him on the subject of time, but in the whole of his lengthened and professedly definite statement of this subject, he does not once touch upon the real grounds of difference. Instead of this he dilates on facts which neither we nor any one at all conversant with mining, would for one moment dispute. The whole of his tirade, therefore to prove that "the piece work contracts have reference to time, and the time which usually forms the basis of such contracts is eight hours of fair and skilful labour," goes for nothing. He does not state but he leads us to infer, that time is the basis of our bargains. This we deny. For how is time the basis of piecework? Our position, in this respect, being rather anomalous we will explain it and the public will see how our champion contrives to elude the real dispute. At the commencement of each quarter we enter into an agreement to work in a certain part

of the mine at a certain rate per fathom or per Bing of ore. Until this bargain as we call it, is completed we are allowed subsistence money at the rate of 10 shillings peer week, and at the casting up of our accounts this subsistence money is deducted, and the surplus if any, given to us. Now it sometimes happens that through the miscalculation or other cause, that we cannot earn, by bargain, the amount of 10 shillings per week, and in this case we are overpaid for the time being, because ten shillings per week is the regular allowance; but the amount of our deficiency is charged against us. Now it is clear from this, that the basis of our contracts is piece not time, and that time is merely a protective clause for the masters. It is on the assumption that time is the basis Mr Sopwith has founded the whole of his arguments, and, therefore, we deny their relevancy. As a protective condition we have always acknowledged it, and we have repeatedly challenged Mr Sopwith to point out by name or circumstances, infractions, of the rule, and then for the sake of these delinquents, we would submit to be watched. We need hardly say our challenge has never yet been accepted.

“The real point of difference, therefore, is in the introduction of the words “in place,” and we charge Mr S. with unfairness in passing it over without a single notice. It has been the rule from time immemorial to consider that our day’s work was commenced as we entered the mine, with our load of from five to twenty pounds weight of tools upon our back. Mr S., however, after much hesitation, has decided that it does not commence till we have reached the face of the mine. Now we contend that this innovation is introduced without sufficient grounds. In the first place, because the carrying of tools is real labour, and indeed, the heaviest labour, and while one man may reach the face in ten minutes, it will take another a full hour, thus making a real difference of nearly two hours in the length of the day; and second place, because our view is established by the usage of all the great mining fields of the north.

“In reference to the Curry’s we need not say much, Mr Sopwith says they have “shown not only great ability, but a commendable spirit, in the discharge of their laborious and responsible duties.” We can only say that if insolence and injustice are commendable, then their conduct may be commendable. We are waiting with some impatience for the opportunity of disclosing before some disinterested gentlemen, the commendable acts of these two worthies. In the meantime we will ask Mr S., to square their conduct with “commendation,” when one of them appointed John Gill Nixon to work at his brother Thomas Curry’s piece work, during his absence, and at the same paid him for his own day’s works. Possibly he will be able, from this, too, to show the connection between piece and timework, and how the one acts as a basis for the other.

“He refers with much self-complacency to his “good conscience and his happy mind,” and though we have no wish to disturb these further than our own interests are involved, we cannot but notice incidentally a few other statements in his letter. We might go over it all; sentence by sentence, but time forbids us.

“He speaks of a reduction of workmen being inevitable, when he instructed an account of hours to be taken; and then again he tells us, “he aims only at what is absolutely essential to our welfare.” Now who would believe that the man, who so plausibly professes such regard for our interests, at the very time this reduction of workmen took place, refused to grant them employment at certain reservoirs, which he was constructing in the neighbourhood. It is a fact that he let the contract for these reservoirs with the condition that no miners were to be employed; and the consequence was, that one of the strangers who took the job, after quartering upon some of the miners the whole time, decamped with the sum of £85, and leaving the

whole of his bills unpaid. He also refers to what are termed the "exceptions" to the eight-hour shifts arising from wetness, defective ventilation, or other cause, and says that for these a "liberal allowance" is made. At the risk of disturbing his "happy mind," we will mention one or two instances of this "liberal allowance," of which he boasts. In a working which has for years been considered an exception, and where frequently candles would not burn, a partnership was offered a bargain with seven hour shifts, and when they offered to reason the case that the terms were impossible, they were told that if they would not accept those terms they might walk out. Now it is acknowledged, that three hours is the utmost which any man can work in this place under ordinary circumstances. They were thus compelled to accept the bargain, and evade the terms as well as they could. In several other places which from wetness, have invariably been considered exception, his kind consideration of our interests has suggested that seven hour shifts are quite practicable and in order to forward these interests he offered us the alternative of accepting these terms or ceasing work. Now in such cases four hours are, and have always till lately, been considered as much as any man can stand.

"He quotes the agreement which was drawn at the interview with Mr Atkinson, and which he says, was signed "not only by the deputation but by the whole body of the miners." Now we have before stated, that this was signed by the deputation solely as a concession on their part to bring the subject to settlement, and to prevent a strike, which otherwise seemed inevitable, and signed too, along with another agreement, promising to refer the point of working "in place" to arbitration. It was submitted to the men when they were receiving their subsistence money, and the latter was offered only on the condition that they would sign. After many refusals, and not till the masers had reiterated the promise of investigation could the majority of them be induced to sign, and some of them even to this day have not done so. It is we consider, very unfair in Mr Sopwith to submit this as one of our threefold obligations of working eight hours per day, when it formed only part of the treaty, and was granted upon conditions which he himself has never fulfilled.

"He says the watching was resumed when, from a weeks experiment, "it was apparent that no improvement was attempted.' This we deny; first because an improvement extending to beyond the prescribed time did take place; and secondly, because Mr Sopwith was then from home, and could not, therefore, have time in one week to observe the result of the discontinuance. On the contrary, we have good reason for believing that it was another of his tricks to get us commenced work, and that he had appointed the watching to be resumed before he left home.

"In referring to the first visit of the deputation to represent the sentiments of the meeting that had been held, he says we requested "not an investigation into any alleged cause of complaint, but the dismissal of two of the under agents," and then he goes on to give, in his own words his reply. Now we say, and we are prepared to prove, that the whole assertion is a falsehood, for we cannot call it by any other name. As soon as he learnt that a meeting had been held without his consent, he refused to hear any more as to its nature. We are sorry thus publicly to accuse him of direct falsehood, but the truth compels us, as the question has been publicly made.

"He says that "Mr Atkinson denounced the conduct of the leading parties in those proceedings as infamous;" whereas on the 14th of December, at the meeting to which we alluded in our last, he admitted that we had made a "very powerful impression upon Mr Atkinson's mind" in our favour.

“Again he says. “I consider the minds of the great bulk of the Allenheads miners to be inflamed by the ignorant and malicious conduct of a few demagogues.” Since he wrote the above, he will have had what we should consider a sufficient refutation of its truth, for on his saying so, a few days ago, to a great number who were congregated to hear him, they unanimously cried that they were influenced by no one, but that they had each sufficient grounds for standing out against him.

“As to his judgement, ability in mining, fair dealing or desire to promote the welfare of the working classes, we will say nothing; we will leave it to your readers, and the above facts which we could multiply tenfold, will, perhaps, help them to a conclusion. There are many points in which we know not whether the Currys or he are to blame; if he chooses to exempt them, then we can have no objection. But even then, if he acknowledges himself the instigator, we cannot acquit the Currys for the arbitrary manner in which his instructions were carried out. We have even yet too good an opinion of him in this respect, and too thorough a knowledge of the character of the Currys, to believe that he is at the bottom of all.

“Our chief cause of congratulation in the appearance of Mr Sopwith’s letter, however is that he admits the principle of arbitration. Had he done so six months ago, instead of wishing to be so clever in doing everything himself, he might have saved himself an unenviable popularity, and ourselves much misery and distress. We have no objection to the originally appointed gentlemen, Mr Roddam and Mr Nevin, but as Mr Sopwith seems wishful for a gentleman of “high position,” and names Mr Jobling, we have no desire to thwart him. In his capacity of “chairman of the magistrates” we confess we have no dealings with Mr Jobling, and, therefore, he is except in the most general sense, unknown to us; but we do not for a moment doubt the character which Mr Sopwith gives him. And we presume Mr Sopwith will have no objection that we, on our part, appoint Thomas Wilson, Esq., of Shotley, a gentleman whom we know to be not only of high position, but of thorough experience in mining matters. We would further stipulate that Mr Sopwith should appear on behalf of the masters, and that we should choose one from our body to represent us, and that the investigation shall be open to the miners, and to extend to every matter of which we complain. We are glad to find, too, that Mr S. hopes to be at liberty to submit the documents in the possession of Mr Beaumont’s executors, as they will be valuable auxiliaries. A tribunal thus constituted, and an investigation thus opened, is what we above all things desire. If however, Mr Sopwith will not agree to this, and is determined at all hazards to retain his two agents, notwithstanding all that we have or can prove against them, then our only alternative is to leave the case in the hands of the public, and to seek for homes in other lands, for we are determined to a man never to return to our employment until either an investigation is made, or until our grievances are redressed. As we said before so we now repeat, we are willing to be servants but refuse to be slaves, and still worse the slaves of capricious beings whose knowledge is only that of power, and whose dignity that of pride. And in case of his refusal to this proposal we offer our services to all or any who are willing to give “a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work.” If however, an investigation is brought about we have little doubt of an amicable settlement of this much vexed question, and in the hopes of its speedy realisation,

We remain, Gentlemen, yours &c.,

THE ALLENHEADS MINERS, Allenheads, April 4, 1849.

21st April 1849⁸

"GENTLEMEN, The circumstances which have occurred since our last, in reference to our dispute with our employers, impel us again to appear before the public, and to expose still further the conduct and character of those with whom we are at issue, and, if need be, to deduce from their proceedings the most convincing proofs of the justness of the position we have assumed.

"In our first letter we referred to the many ineffectual attempts we had made privately to procure an investigation of our grievances, and called upon our employers either to discuss them publicly or to submit them to arbitration. Mr Sopwith in his reply, at once took the responsibility of the whole proceedings and as "the whole of the details would be too voluminous for publication," he offered to submit them "to any gentleman of high position and of experience in mining matters," naming the respected chairman of magistrates for this division of the county, as a proper person. To such a process we assented with the utmost pleasure, and further named T. Wilson, Esq., as a co-arbitrator with Mr Jobling, as we knew him to be possessed of both the qualifications required by Mr S. This with two or three other minor conditions to ensure fair play (as we knew the man we had to deal with), were submitted in our last, and witness the result! The first movement after this was the posting of the following hand bill at Allenheads, which we will publish to "amuse the public," as Mr S. has declined to do so."

Allenheads, April 10th, 1849.

"I hereby state, for the information of the miners and other workmen at Allenheads, that I decline the arrangement, proposed in their name, in the Newcastle Guardian of the 7th instant.

I further give notice, that it is not my intention to suspend the working of these mines longer than a week they will be resumed next week, and I think it right to state, that numerous applications have been made by respectable workmen, both miners and washers, who are willing to conform to the regulations of this office."

THOMAS SOPWITH.

"Now what must be the character of the man who can prevaricate in this manner? First to accede to an arbitration, and then, on the first step towards its accomplishment, to make a precipitate retreat. So far as we can discern, there are but three motives which could influence him in this action, either he must have proposed Mr Jobling for some sinister end, which he would not be able to accomplish in the presence of Mr Wilson; or on mature reflection (for his letter had evidently been penned in haste), seeing the inevitable result of an investigation, he resolved to brave it out with tyranny rather than submit to an ignominious exposure, or that he merely made the offer as a show of candour before the public, which he should dispense with as soon as the occasion required. The first evidences a baseness of principle, the second a consciousness of guilt, and the third a specious insincerity. We will leave him to say by which of them he was influenced, for if we were to judge by analogy we should be at a loss, for all three might be proved with almost equal facility. The fact however serves our material purpose, as it shows that he dare not meet us before a public tribunal. At our first outset, we asked the public to be our judges, and we now ask them to judge from this fact! It also, by this, adds the coping stone to the opinion, which

has for some time obtained among us, that we should no longer put confidence in a word he, utters.

"Mr Sopwith during his short but eventful agency, and particularly during the latter stages of this revolution, has sufficiently declared the animus by which he is directed; and, for the benefit of our successors, and in order to show clearly the philosophy of our separation, we will, at parting with him, point out briefly the result of our observations on this head. The leading mental quality which has displayed itself during his whole career among us is vanity, and to this, as a primary agent, is doubtless referable most of the evils to which we have been subjected. The reader of this letter will see a specimen of what we have orally displayed a hundred times, of the self complacency with which he views each of his steps to fame, from Lowes' Balsam and the water skeel to the levees of royalty, and the agency of Allenheads. "The reasonable share of success which has rewarded a life of patient industry," is the never failing source of a "happy mind" to its fortunate possessor. And the gratification is only equalled in intensity by the avidity with which he sought popularity amongst ourselves, by the use of flattery and promises; and it is surprising how, by the standing argument that he "aims at nothing but what is absolutely essential to our welfare," he continued to keep alive so long the flame of popularity. But vanity must needs have the approbation of masters too, and some notable deed must be done to secure it. And here it was that, coupled with his ignorance of practical mining, his vanity overreached itself, and he committed the first fatal mistake. In attempting to transport the usage's of the cabinet manufactory to the groves of Allenheads, and thereby introduce an improved system into the mining fields of the North of England, he made the first signal display of his ignorance. The principles were not applicable; but his ignorance of the details of mining debarred him from seeing this till it was too late. To retreat therefore was the only justifiable course, but pride forbade it. And hence resulted the vacillation, subterfuge, and dishonesty, which form such a picture of inconsistencies in his after career. His pride, however, has gained the victory, and now to support it, he sacrifices unhesitatingly truth, justice, and honour, and all that is held sacred and inviolable by a gentleman and a Christian. It is but another example of the sacred proverb, "No man can serve two masters," &c. He exercises the prerogative of our labour, and now we hand it over to the keeping of his own "good conscience," and trust that its future exercise will never disturb the happiness of his mind.

"There is yet another avenue open to us for substantial redress, and we, by this present, acquaint him with our intention of summoning him before the Small Debts Court, for various small sums of wages, which he refuses to pay us. During the later stages of the dispute while he was intending to starve us into submission, he has, on various pretexts, withheld subsistence money of those parties who were working to complete the contracts, which were unexpired at the time the general cessation took place. The first case is, where an ill ventilated part of the mine, the partners have nearly completed the contract, were dismissed on the pretext that they had not fulfilled their engagement respecting time, and of course without a settlement. Another case is that of Samuel Vickers and partners; from whom subsistence money was withheld for no apparent reason, except that they might be suspected of sharing their pittance with starving neighbours. We may instance too, the dismissal of the washers (who have not mingled in the dispute), without notice, and without cause assigned, and many others might be cited equally flagrant. He may consider this as the preliminary notice that if all arrears of wages are not paid forthwith, summonses will be issued against him from the Small Debts Court.

"We cannot but acknowledge that Mr Sopwith has beaten us, and compels us now to raise the siege. The principle of starving us has succeeded so far that it compels us to retire. So far we will yield him the reward of his "industry," but it will be a dark passage for the biographer of Thomas Sopwith, Esq., in his brilliant career of fame, to confess that Mr Sopwith, in order to promote his own selfish ends, has disturbed the repose of one of the most quiet and peaceful dale under heaven, and had spread misery and poverty where peace and plenty have for ages slumbered. We are now preparing to disperse ourselves over the earth wherever our feet may find a resting-place. We take with us only the testimony of a good conscience, and the conviction that our sorrows have not been brought upon us by our own misconduct. True we may still continue here, but it would only be submitting to a degradation, which we despise. We again offer ourselves to any who are willing to give "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work."

We remain, gentlemen, yours, &c.,

THE ALLENHEADS MINERS

"P.S. We shall forward you particulars of any future proceedings which may be worthy of note; in the meantime you need not place any reliance upon the latter part of the notice, where he says that the works will be resumed in a week; as, with a few exceptions, we are all determined not to commence, and his efforts to procure men from a distance have been unavailing."

7 July 1849⁹

"GENTLEMEN, We have been waiting for some time to observe the effects of our last letter upon the minds of the public and of our opponents. With the miner, each one unanswered and we may say unanswerable statements, has been but an additional confirmation of the positions we at first assumed, and they have now learned more clearly to estimate the man whose pretensions have been thrust before the world so perniciously for so many years. With the latter, though we have not seen the full fruits of our labour, we are yet so conscious of the potency of truth, when honestly and unflinchingly spoken that we are perfectly satisfied "our labour has not been in vain." For though after Mr Sopwith's pusillanimous refusal to grant a hearing of our case after he had already publicly made an offer, we cannot expect any honourable adjustment with him now, yet we trust that the case has been so laid before the representatives of our late master, that they, at any rate, have felt the shame which we intend to heap on him, and that they will now acknowledge the justness of our cause, though they have not put upon him the discredit of interfering on our behalf. At any rate, both he and they may expect, that so long as justice is refused to be done (at least for the future), and the press is open to our appeals, we will not cease to expose them before the world. Already we have been restricted, not for want of materials but for want of space; the records of each week would furnish abundant materials, and, did our means allow, we would give the world a weekly compendium of their proceedings.

"Since our last, a few more of the rejected ones have been set to work; the greatest proportion, however, are still suffering all the evils of starvation, now increased proportionally to the length of time which it has been prolonged; and, as if to complete the full measure of his iniquity, he has carried out a wholesale system of expulsion against all whom he suspected of being adverse to his interests. So rigorously has he

carried out this proceeding that none have escaped. Amongst others he has expelled an old miners widow, whose son, for sooth, was one of the deputation that waited upon him in October! Another old widow, whose daughter is married to one of the same deputation! An old man, with his ten motherless children! And the list might be increased ten fold. He has too, broken up nearly all the old partnerships, and introduced a system of favouritism. A considerable number, despairing of any honourable terms with a man of Mr Sopwith's stamp, have preferred to endure the sorrows of separation from home and friends, where and amongst whom they were born and hoped to die, to dare the perils of the Atlantic, and to trust to the honour and hospitality of strangers, rather than endure the treatment of this professed friend at home.

"The following letter is from one of the emigrants, and as a tribute to his straightforward and honest bearing, is well worthy of publication: -

April 1849.

"Sir, I feel a conviction in my mind that it is my duty to write these few lines, being the only way you admit of corresponding with you on any grievance. I am not satisfied with the treatment I met on the 11th of January, the keeping back of our lent money, under the pretext of not having earned it, at the same time other men under similar circumstances, were receiving their full money. I consider this unfair treatment. We continued to work our bargain a month longer than we received any pay, and thought of nothing but completing our bargain, which stands unfinished still; and, according to contract, you have one months pay which is our due. I can name different partnerships that were back in their earnings at the same time, who got their full lent money and worked their bargains out; on the other hand, at the Michaelmas bargains, your inspectors very well knew that we had 9 ---- length, and varying from 3 feet to 4 feet in thickness of sole to take up before we could commence our bargain; they forcing us to take up this sole and keep a --- ---, which took us nearly the first month and not paying any bargain for it, of course we could not have a penny of our lent money earned the first month. Why not stop it then? And you would have shown us at once that you intended us to work one month for nothing. It is clear to me, and should be to you, that the taking up of this sole kept us a month in arrears and gave you a pretext of saying our money was not earned. Any impartial man will readily see we have been worse used than any partnership that works in these mines. As to our working I can go back for many years and ask you or your inspectors if they have known our manner of working since I took the old workings? It has been nearly our constant practice to work six days in the week, and I venture to say, more ten hour shifts than eight hour shifts, and your books will show we have been scantily remunerated for our labour these last three years averaging little more than ten shillings per week. If it has been the motive of you or your colleagues, by hunger or starvation to drive me and my family to some dishonourable act, you are greatly mistaken: I would rather beg my bread than do any such thing. I have been a workman at Allenheads ever since I could work; and it has been my constant care to gain a livelihood by honest endeavours, at all times rendering due obedience to my masters but the watching plan is as disagreeable to me as any man. Any practical miner very well knows that it is injurious to the interest both of masters and men. I have no thought of taking any bargain until I know the watching has been done away with, and our old privileges are granted. I was twenty years in Mr Beaumont's band, and had the privilege of hearing him speak on many occasions; and there is a full conviction on my mind he would never have suffered this treatment to go on. I have lived to see this fine band come to nought by arbitrary means. I firmly

deny ever attending any mob meetings, the meetings here having been of the most civilised character, as every man was left to decide by his own judgement. I also disclaim being identified with Irishmen having read the newspapers many years ago, and seen the depredations and cold blooded murders they have committed; and it hurts the feelings of any honest and well disposed man, to be compared to men guilty of such debauchery and crime. We still demand our money, and hope you will answer this letter."

Samuel Vickers, Allenheads Miner,

To Thos. Sopwith, Esq.

"This letter scarcely needs comment, its honesty and independent statements speak for themselves. It was sent by the writer as his only means of obtaining access to Mr Sopwith; the bargain was let under certain restrictions the pretexts for dismissing them, and we need scarcely say they neither received their money nor a reply. The uncertainty of the time at which he would be called to ----- alone prevented him from bringing him before the county court.

"We are sometimes told when we state cases like this that they cannot possibly be correct that no man having or professing to have the least sense of justice or honour could commit such actions. We are quite aware that Mr Sopwith has not given up the profession of honour, and yet his actions are precisely what we state; he endeavours to evade the disgrace by one of those puerile expedients to which he customarily resorts when his deeds of darkness are exposed. In this case he endeavours to make the under agent his scape goat, and professing to have given all matters pertaining to the men in the hands of Wm. Curry, he is not responsible for nor will interfere in them. We can easily understand the elements of this compact. Mr Sopwith has found himself in a dilemma as it would be an acknowledgement of guilt to return and he afterwards makes Curry the ostensible actor. As compensation the latter receives extra pay and abundance of flattery. Though this is seemingly ingenious, yet we cannot help calling it puerile, inasmuch as its daily operation makes it so very evident. For why is Mr Sopwith less capable or less careful of regulating the works now than formerly and why is Mr Curry so much more competent? We would ask too, where is Mr Sopwith's "regard for the welfare of the men" who were "led away by a few demagogues," when he refuses them the very smallest consideration. The fact however proves that Mr Curry is now virtually the governor of Allenheads mines! We have allowed him to pass for some time without almost a notice, as while we were discussing his master, we did not consider him worthy of it, he has however risen so immensely in the world, and particularly in his own estimation through our silence and the flattery of his employers, that we shall have to bring him again to a knowledge of himself and of the public.

"One fact will serve our purpose. After the disruption, several of the hangers on of Mr Sopwith were sworn in special constables, in order to throw a kind of odium and dread over the character of the miners. Amongst others who thus undertook to be protectors of the public peace, were Wm. Curry and Thomas Bewick. It so happened that their services had never been required; but a short time ago, during the sale of the effects belonging to one of the poor washers, who has been driven to America these two men came out and commenced a row amongst the people, and the auctioneer being the most prominent individual, they directed special efforts on him, assaulting and otherwise abusing him. No other specials being at hand he was obliged to save himself as well as he could. He retreated to Allendale town, and forthwith sent them each a magistrate's summons to appear to "give account of their stewardship."

Mr Atkinson and Mr Sopwith were both upon the bench, and the result was they were each fined 2s 6d and costs, for creating a brawl. The public will judge the fitness of a man to superintend some hundred workmen, who could be so inordinately inflated with self esteem, and so extremely shallow in intellect, as to think that he might break the public peace with impunity, or who could be so ignorant as to imagine that because he was a "special constable": he was at liberty to transgress the laws himself!

"Before concluding this somewhat lengthy letter we would just remark upon one point, which will not have been overlooked by Mr Atkinson, namely that as a magistrate he sat and investigated a grievance made against Wm. Curry by an auctioneer, but he refused to investigate a grievance made by his own miners against the same man. This is a fact, and facts are stubborn things!"

We remain, yours, &c.,

THE EX-MINERS OF ALLENHEADS

3 November 1849¹⁰

"GENTLEMEN, There is a class of men who may aptly be compared to a horse in a bog, which, as it finds itself entangling, plunges the more violently forward, at every step sinking deeper in corresponding ratio to the violence of its efforts, till at length it is overwhelmed. To such a class belongs Mr Thos. Sopwith, of Allenheads. Having made a false step in the administration of his master's affairs, for the gratification of an overweening variety, he persists in following out the course he has taken, regardless of all the considerations of truth, honour, or reputation, which it involves, and of the disastrous consequences to which it must inevitably lead. "The way of transgressors is hard." Since our last, matters have proceeded much in the same way as before - the same duplicity on the part of Mr. Sopwith, the same superciliousness on the part of the agents, and necessarily the same distress and dissatisfaction amongst the men. We have not time to dwell upon these ordinary annoyances - the arbitrary withholding of wages, the equally arbitrary severing of partnerships, the withholding of wages, the equally arbitrary severing of partnerships, the withholding of employment "till the hydraulic machines are finished" (doubtless to make a great show on that occasion to demonstrate their suitability), but will pass on to expose one of the most gross attempts at imposture, which during the whole of this controversy we have had to notice.

"At the opening of the shooting season, young Mr Beaumont arrived at Allenheads; and in the course of his stay, many communications were sent to him by miners complaining of their grievances. How these communications were received, or what effects they produced, we have no means of knowing; but, immediately after he left, Mr Sopwith called a meeting of the men, and, in the course of a voluble harangue, he insinuated his specious professions of regard, enlarged on the regret he experienced that they should have been led away by a few mischievous men, into what he termed an uncalled-for strike; and, contrasting the happy condition of Weardale with that of Allenheads, which he said resulted from this ill-reposed confidence. "But," said he, stopping suddenly, "I am leaving the subject of the meeting - I brought you here to submit to you a certain proposition," of which the following is an abstract: - That sorry for the strike, and for the misrepresentations of Messrs. Wm. and John Curry; that since they resumed work, they were perfectly satisfied with the agents, and that now there existed the most perfect harmony between them; also that they would keep the peace, and would not injure the property of Mr Beaumont or others. And, laying the

document before them, he said he wished them to sign it immediately, as he intended to lay it before Mr Beaumont, and by this means they would avoid a police being brought among them. The propositions were put to the meeting by Robert Watson, seconded by Isaac Varty, but few hands were held up in their favour, and these were chiefly quarry men, washers, masons, &c, who had not mingled in the dispute. These also proceeded to sign the document, but the majority refused. It was afterwards repeatedly presented to them in the miners' room, as they entered the mine, but with little success, and therefore the bargain day was chosen to press it more perseveringly. As the partnerships went in to take their bargains, Wm. Curry presented the declaration of signature, and on the first partnership refusing, they were forthwith sent to Mr Sopwith, who interrogated them on the reasons of their refusal. They replied to his questions; and, finding that all his artifice was in vain, they were severally released. Some, however, were deprived of their work for their contumacy. One young man, who had been absent since the 1st of January, and who therefore was acquainted with recent proceedings only by hearsay, after being promised work, and preparing lodgings and other necessities, on returning to the office to sign his partnership agreement, was presented instead with the obnoxious document, and desired to sign. He magnanimously refused; and, after a long altercation with Wm. Curry, in which the latter told him that Mr Sopwith had left special instructions to the effect, he was told he could not have work unless he signed. Another young man was served in a similar manner, and dismissed; and a third, whose old grandmother, now quite blind, and an uncle then very ill, and since dead, were both depending upon him, was reluctantly compelled to sign, in preference to seeing his relatives starving. Mr Sopwith has, as usual, left the scene of conflict as soon as the first symptoms of his failure took place, leaving his less specious, but not less unscrupulous myrmidon, to fight the battle of injustice himself.

"Now, let us look for a moment at this document, and the means Mr S. has taken to give it effect.

"The clause referring to the protection of Mr Beaumont's property is doubtless of the same nature as his former "special constables," and is intended to insinuate to Mr Beaumont that our conduct is disorderly and riotous. His threat of "police" is of the same nature, and he himself knows well that the whole is a base slander on the characters of the dwellers in the vale.

"But besides this purpose, the clause had doubtless to serve another and more important one; namely - to divert the men from the real object of the document. Mr Sopwith well knows that there is not a man at Allenheads who is not willing to keep the peace, and to protect if necessary, Mr Beaumont's property; and he doubtless imagined that many would sign on that account, omitting to notice the other clauses. Or, in case of refusal, he could upbraid them with a want of loyalty to their master - a charge which we indignantly rebut.

"Again, he asks them to certify, that since they resumed work they are perfectly satisfied. This is tantamount to asking them to shut their eyes against all the insults they are receiving, and all the poverty and misery that surrounds them, and then to repeat after him, "We see everything that thou hast done, and behold, it is very good.

"And let us remark another design of this infamous document, It asks them to express satisfaction with him. Why does he not put his own name in connection with that of the Curries? Because he knows that if expressed, it would call for the

indignation of every thinking and honest man in the works, whereas if merely implied, it may be overlooked.

"We will not stay here to inquire into the character of those minions who have seconded Mr Sopwith's efforts in this and in other cases. There never was any deed, however dark or wicked or mean, to be done, but there was found some one ready to perform it; and the very fact of defection from our ranks, while it stamps at once the character of the delinquents, is but an additional proof of the justice of our cause, "as exceptions are proofs of the general rule."

"Viewed as a whole, this document is evidently intended to prove to Mr Beaumont, by the testimony of the men, that the administration of his affairs by Mr Sopwith towards them, has been conducted with justice, fairness, and generosity - that their previous representations were false - the rest of the document being merely a decoy. Now, it is just twelve months since the first actual disruption took place, and, if in that time they had seen cause to change their views on his policy and conduct, and what then appeared harsh and unjust, to consider now as kind and generous, we could have had no objection, as it would have been but to restore to him his good character, of which he had been unjustly deprived. But, when we look at the means he has taken to extort this acknowledgement, it is the crowning act of all his villainy. By withdrawing the means of support from the men, he puts the cries of children and the grief of wives and parents, in opposition to dictates of conscience. And who will wonder if some have yielded! By a continued system of harassing and arbitrary treatment, too, he has managed to break the spirits of many of the peaceably disposed, who are now ready to purchase peace and an opportunity of earning a precarious subsistence, at almost any price, and, by the aid of those measures, he is endeavouring to procure a testimonial to his own character! His document will go up to Mr Beaumont with the names of many as certifying to the goodness of character, who execrate his name.

"But, when the truth is thus laid bare, we will ask, what is the real character of the man who will take such measures to keep or restore himself in the good-will of his employers! We ask a discerning public, whose sympathy in our sorrows we have already received. And lest either be dubious of the facts, we challenge Mr Sopwith to come forwards and disprove them if he can."

We are, yours &c.,

THE EX-MINERS OF ALLENHEADS

The miner's major complaint about the ruling of a five-day week of 8 hours, was not so much the five days but the 8 hours. The concept of a 5 day week was not new this had been included in bargains at Coalcleugh and Allenheads since 1843. The Swinhope, and Allendale bargains for 1845 to 1846 all show the requirement to work a five-day week, but there is no mention of hours to be worked. At Coalcleugh on the 14th October 1846 the John Scott partnership (Isaac Brown was the other partner) it was stipulated that they were to work five eight hour shifts per man, and five other bargains also had this stipulation.¹¹ The first bargain to mention an eight hour day at Allenheads was that given the Hugh Nixon partnership (Joseph Heslop, Thomas Heslop, and John Heslop), on the 7th January 1847, *to open out a shaft inside the Fawside Wall and East End 10 fathoms, ... to work five eight hour shifts per week per man.*¹² This became a common directive and in the April 1847 bargains all Swinhope and Allendale bargains specified five eight-hour days per week per man. After April

1847 this instruction was not on all the bargains given, many only specified a five day week, until August 1848, when once again the bargains stipulated the hours to be worked. The bargain given to John Varty and partners at Allenheads on the 6th December 1848 was even more specific, *“to work five seven hour shifts per week per man, this bargain to be at an end if the full seven hours are not **worked in place**.”*¹³ Also the bargain given to George Lee and partners at Allenheads on the 6th December 1848 was also specific, *“to work five eight hour shifts per week per man.”*¹⁴ *The first men to go in at 6am, the second at 2pm, and the third at 10pm. This bargain to be at an end if the full eight hours are not **worked in place**.”* The John Waggott partnership received a bargain on the 6th May 1849 which stipulated they were to work five eight hour shifts per week per man, or 9 hour shifts from entering the mine to coming out.¹⁵ The Swinhope, Allendale, and Coalcleugh bargains all specified number of days and number of hours after 1849, but it is interesting to note that neither before nor after the dispute did the **Weardale** bargains specify either the number of days or the number of hours. After the strike all Allenheads bargains show five shifts of eight hours per man, and it was in March 1849 that 8 hours began to be mentioned in the Coalcleugh bargains, before that they only stated 5 days to be worked.

A number of bargains had written on them, *“not to have more money advanced than what is earned.”* or *“to have money advanced only when earned.”* So there would be occasions when some men did not get the full subsistence of 10 shillings per week.

The table below shows an inconsistency on the part of the agents, the agreement of 1846 was that a bargain was for 5 days of 8 hours per day, but this was not always being included in the bargain despite the claim by Thomas Sopwith that it was. It is little wonder then that the men thought that they could flout this ruling, if the agents were not including it in the bargains.¹⁶ This of course is not an excuse for the men as it had been made extremely clear to them what was required of them in 1846, in return for the increased subsistence and assistance with arrears.

Date of Bargain	Percentage	Percentage
mentioning 5 days	mentioning 8 hours	
October 1846	52%	0%
January 1847	66%	2%
April 1847	65%	65%
July 1847	63%	35%
January 1848	72%	0%
April 1848	65%	1%
June 1848	67%	1%
October 1848	71%	42%
1st January 1849	100% (only 7 bargains)	100%
April 1849	100%	100%
July 1849	100%	100%
September 1849	100%	100%

On the 19 August 1849 Sopwith writes that *“The strike that lasted upwards of 4 months has caused me to discontinue the services of many miners and other workmen (probably a hundred in all) and among these were the more active and artful persons who had fermented mischief.”*¹⁷

The delegates Joseph Heslop, William Snaith, Nicholas Philipson, Joseph Hewitson, Thomas Dargue, and Hugh Shield who were the miners delegates, were the active

men that Sopwith referred to, by dismissing these men, Sopwith had put them into a position which meant they had nothing to lose, this was probably a serious error of judgement on his part.

The table below shows the changes that occurred in the mining population after the 1849 strike compared to before it took place, it is interesting to note that the average number of men in 1848 was 266 and in 1850 it was 211, a drop of 55.¹⁸ This is because after the dismissal of around 100 men during and immediately following the strike, others were brought in to take the place of these men, thirty coming from the Alston area. Approximately sixty men, women and children left their homes in May of 1849, emigrating to America.¹⁹

George Dickinson wrote *"The men had ruined their cause by extravagant demands and hasty action. They were also misled by their delegates, by whom they were led to believe that they were in possession of information which would soon be known, and would give them their 'rights'."*²⁰ This view is probably correct, the men had made agreements that they failed to keep, they were in a very poor bargaining position, and in retrospect the strike should not have occurred. Thomas Sopwith could have handled the situation differently, but there can be little doubt that in his mind the men had broken their contract, and they played into his hands, and enabled him to reduce his work force.

Allendale Miners Employed

YEAR	Jan	Mar/April	June	Oct	AVERAGE
1843	319	282	293	297	298
1844	278	281	298	290	287
1845	286	311	263	295	289
1846	314	279	264	273	282
1847	291	278	276	273	279
1848	269	276	256	263	266
1849	22	228	191	239	170
1850	243	198	197	205	211
1851	230	209	194	237	218
1852	231	223	215	243	228
1853	222	214	212	229	219
1854	204	220	192	186	200
1855	244	202	188	177	203
1856	189	234	179	211	203
Averages					
PRE 1849	293	284	275	282	284
POST Jan 1849	198	216	196	216	206
Difference	95	68	79	66	77

Bargain Periods

1st January - 31 March	31 March - 30th June
30th June - 30th September	30th September - 31 December

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- ¹ Allenheads Arrears book 1846 – 1894. Northumberland Record Office NRO 2762/A84.
- ² Address to the miners and other workmen employed in Mr Beaumont's mines. T. Sopwith 1846.
- ³ Thomas Sopwith Diary. Northumberland Record Office NRO M363 – 378.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Newcastle Guardian 24th March 1849. Newcastle City Library Local History Department.
- ⁶ Ibid. 31st March 1849.
- ⁷ Ibid. 7th April 1849.
- ⁸ Ibid. 21st April 1849.
- ⁹ Ibid. 7th July 1849.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. 3rd November 1849.
- ¹¹ Coalcleugh Bargain Book. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/3A/4
- ¹² Allenheads Bargain Book. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/2A/8
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Thomas Sopwith Diary. Northumberland Record Office NRO M363 – 378.
- ¹⁸ Allenheads Bargain Books. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/2A/8-9.
- ¹⁹ Allendale and Whitfield. Historical and descriptive notices of the two parishes. George Dickinson 1903.
- ²⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 3

LEAD MINING DISPUTES 1863 TO 1873

The dispute of 1863 is not documented, although it is referred to by Mr Joseph Brown at a meeting of the Teesdale miners on the 20th July 1872 when he said that, *"it was just about nine years since he occupied a similar position to that occupied by the Chairman, and at the end of the agitation he was cast overboard without a helping hand being reached out to him from starving."*¹

The period of 1867 - 1868 had been one of relative depression and falling prices, whereas after this there was an economic boom, and full employment. (In 1869 - 1873 there was a credit boom partly due to the increase in availability of gold from Australia and America.) Due to this, prices rose quickly and it was mainly this rise in prices, which provoked the demands for increased wages. In the lead mining districts of the North Pennines there was a general feeling of discontent, resulting in strikes by the Beaumont miners in Weardale, the London Lead Company miners in Teesdale and the Rodderup Fell miners. The first indication of a dispute amongst the miners of the London Lead Company appears in an article in the Hexham Courant dated 27 April 1872.²

"The case of the Teesdale miners is not yet satisfactorily settled. They have had an interview with Mr Bainbridge, the resident agent, and have been advised not to press for an advance of "lent money," and have been told that the average wages last year had been 17s 6d per week, and that the whole of their earnings can be drawn every month if they choose, and that they (the masters) placed no bar upon any man who wished to leave the Company from procuring employment elsewhere. The impression existing in Teesdale, that miners leaving the Company's works lost all interest in the Miner's Fund which is said to have a capital of several thousand pounds, appears to be unfounded. Workmen who leave, in a proper manner, can retain their membership if they choose, and still be entitled to the benefits accruing from the fund."

A meeting between Mr Bainbridge the chief agent of the company, and the miners of Teesdale took place on the 2 May, at which he was presented with a petition.³

"Another interview has taken place between the delegates of the lead miners and Mr R W Bainbridge, the superintendent of the Lead Company's Works, which occupied four hours. A fortnight ago a petition was presented asking for an advance in the subsistence money from 44s to 54s per month, which the men considered very reasonable. The request not being granted, a discussion followed, in which the superintendent reminded the men of other privileges they enjoy - namely, a doctor free, and schooling at a nominal charge. The men contended that these were no greater than those of coal miners who pay a doctor 6d per fortnight, house rent and coals free, 6d per fortnight cartage of coals, 2nd per week average for two children at school, amounting to £2 7s 8d per annum. Compare these charges with the Lead Company, namely, doctor free; school (2) 8s; house rent £3 10s; coals £3 5s; total £7 3s; a comparison putting, the men think, their privileges into the shade. Another cause of complaint was the way in which bargains are let. Suppose a partnership, by extra hours and hard labour, earn a few shillings more per week, the men complain that at the end of the quarter their prices may be lowered, and this encouragement is given to what the Company mean to destroy idleness. What the men want seems to

be to have a fair remunerative price per bing, and then for the masters to allow the men to earn as much as will support their families. They think that if the ordinary work of the miners bring profit to the Company, the extraordinary work must do much more so. Notwithstanding the powerful reasoning of the delegates on these and other points Mr Bainbridge still stood strongly opposed to the petition. Urging another weeks' consideration, the delegates kindly requested the Lead Company, through Mr Bainbridge, to give the petition their most earnest consideration, and to sympathise with the men in their difficulty, stating that if the men did not get their request granted they intended to get up another petition which would contain a rate of wages, the basis of which would range higher than at present; that other classes would be in all probability embraced; and that if the men were obliged to leave the Company's works, the latter would be unlikely to get another lot of men to do the work at similar rates."

Mr Parkin had also explained that the men wanted the compulsion of paying into the miners' fund done away with and it instead be optional. Another grievance explained was that ore not washed by the end of the year was given a valuation by the Agents, and that this was often up to 80% below its value. The Company held this money for five or six months before being paid to the partnership.

To this Mr Bainbridge had proposed to let the bargains by the Fathom, so that everyone would know what they had earned, and he would advance the miners money accordingly. Mr Bainbridge had told them that good industrious men earned a £1 a week it was only the lazy, slippery and indifferent along with the unable, which comprises the other half who earn 15s, so making an average of 17s 6d. The deputation had also complained that if they worked harder in order to earn an extra few shillings, this resulted in the price offered for the bargains being reduced, which only encouraged laziness. What the men wanted was a fair price per fathom or bing, and the miners allowed to earn as much as would enable them to support their families. Mr Bainbridge remained firmly opposed to the miners' petition. Mr Parkin had urged Mr Bainbridge to ask the Company to give the petition serious consideration, stating that if the men did not get their request granted they intended to get up another petition which would contain a rate of wages the basis of which would range higher than at present. He also had said that if the men were obliged to leave the Company's mines the Company would never get another set of men for the same money. They next met Mr Bainbridge on the 9th May when they agreed to try working to the fathom rather than the bing, but the men received no concessions. At a meeting on the 15th May the deputation had been read a letter from the Company informing them that their request for 54s per month subsistence had been granted. The men had offered a vote of thanks to the Company and Mr Bainbridge.⁴

The minutes of the Court of the London Lead Company have very few references to the strike the first being made on Tuesday 14 May 1872. *"The Governor laid before the Court his correspondence with Mr Bainbridge with reference to the petition of the Company's Teesdale miners for an increase of 2/6 per week in the subsistence money."*⁵

"Resolved that the same be granted and that the Governor inform Mr Bainbridge that the Court agree to the Subsistence money being fixed at the rate of 54/- per month subject to whatever precautions may be found necessary to protect the Company from loss through over advances."

The second reference was in the minutes of Tuesday 21 May 1872.

"The Governor communicated further with Mr Bainbridge on the subject of the miners petition for an increase of subsistence money and the demand for an increase of wages on the part of others in the Company employ."⁶

The miners strike was terminated, the Company having conceded to their request for increased subsistence, it was raised 2s 6d to 54s per month. The miners had just agreed to go back to work when the washer boys went on strike, they wanted an advance of 2s 6d per week.⁷

When the men went to take their bargains on the Friday, they were told that there were bargains for single men, and those that did not have sons involved in the washer boy's strike. Bargains would not be given to parents of washer boys until their sons had returned to work. A deputation went to see Mr Bainbridge, but he did not change his mind, so the men refused to take up their bargains. The mass meeting of the miners at which there were 1,000 or 1,100 miners assembled from Coldberry, Red Groves, Skears, Wire Gill, Little Egglehope, Sharneberry, Whitfield Brow, Bollyhope Burn, Ashgill and Ashgill Head, which took place after this.⁸

"Middleton in Teesdale was the scene of much excitement on Saturday, on the occasion of a great mass meeting of the men in the employ of the London Lead Company. The men as most of our readers will be aware, have recently been agitating for an increase of "lent" money, and like their brethren in Weardale they succeeded after some difficulty, in obtaining it, but they had only been at work a short time on the new arrangement when the washer-boys sent in a petition for an advance in wages, and as the masters refused to make any concession, the lads turned out on strike on Wednesday last. At the quarterly bargains on Friday, it was intimated that those miners having either sons or brothers employed as lead washers, and out on strike, would not be allowed to take their usual places until the boys resumed work. This, as a matter of course, created immense excitement, and it was decided by the men to hold a mass meeting with reference to this and a few other matters on the following day. The town during the night was placarded with numerous squibs, and on Saturday morning, long before the time arranged for holding the meeting at Middleton, the village was thronged with miners from the outlying districts. The meeting was held in the open air, and on the temporary platform the two delegates took their places shortly after twelve o'clock. Mr Wm. Parkin occupied the chair and in opening the proceedings narrated the result of the interview the miners had had with the superintendent, Mr Bainbridge, which ended in a letter being read at an interview on the 15th May, to the effect that their request of 54s was granted by the Company, and for which a vote of thanks forwarded. They likewise returned a vote of thanks to the superintendent for consenting to advance them money earned over and above the 54s when earned. There was now a new feature in the movement. After the struggle had partly subsided and the men were going to try on awhile with the advance of subsistence money, although not satisfied with the basis for bargains, the washer boys came out on strike for an advance of wages, and Mr Bainbridge had locked the men out, as there was no one to wash the produce of the mines. The following is a copy of the notice which had been posted in the office: - "Agreeing with a remark made by one of the company's miners, that the washer boys have at present as much ready money as is practical hereafter, a very well conducted and industrious party will have his monthly subsistence money advanced 1s per week beyond his present year's wage, leaving his present year's wage ready to be fixed in the autumn as usual; the 'back' 1s per week from the beginning of this year's ore dressing will be paid on the 29th of June.-signed, R W Bainbridge, Middleton House."

They would all understand the purport of that notice, and as there were several speakers to follow, and several resolutions to submit to the meeting, he would not detain them farther.

"The meeting was then addressed by Messrs R Hutchinson, Isaac Parkin, Jacob Nixon, Ezra Lowes, William Dawson, Joseph Richardson, John Watson, George Armstrong, and John Scott, the tone of their remarks being to the effect that notwithstanding they were locked out in consequence of the strike of the washer boys, they should support the boys, their demand being reasonable.

"The following resolutions were then passed: -

- 1. That the London lead Company's miners in Middleton in Teesdale, being locked out in consequence of the washers strike for advance of wages, and not being permitted to work unless the boys resume their employment, we consider ourselves disconnected with the Company's works, and that if we go to work again it must be on new conditions.*
- 2. That if we go to work again we have 54s lent money per month, and £1 per week as the basis.*
- 3. That a protection committee be formed to look after the interests of the workmen.*
- 4. That the starting of the boy's wages be 10d instead of 8d at 12 years of age, and to be raised at not less than 3d per day per year, and to be paid off as Mr Bainbridge had suggested.*

"In the course of some conversation which followed, it was decided that Mr Birch, the head governor, should be requested to come down from London, and that the delegates have an interview with him in reference to the present state of affairs.

The meeting then separated."

During this meeting one miner explained how a partnership had taken a bargain at 11s a bing and raised ore worth £2,000 to the Company, but at the pays found themselves to be 45s in debt; he said that those who raised most money were not always the most fortunate. Mr Ezra Lowe said that he was 8 years of age when he started working as a washer boy, for which he receives 4d per day. When he was thirteen years old his father had died leaving a legacy of debt to his children. He did not wish to leave a similar legacy to his children. He also pointed out that his father had not been lazy, he had for 15 years done nearly double work.⁹

Mr Birch the Governor of the Company and Mr Wigram the Deputy Governor agreed to meet the workmen, the meeting taking place on Saturday the 1st June in Middleton school. Before the meeting the miners decided to add an extra clause to their returning to work, that their hours be reduced from 8 to 7 hours. Mr Birch began by complimenting the men and then described the dispute as he saw it. He answered some of the miner's points, the miners could work as much as they wanted and if they wished to work Saturdays to earn extra, Bye bargains were available. He also pointed out that men were not dismissed for not joining the miners fund, if they did not join they were not taken on, and anyone not wishing to join was free to seek employment elsewhere. The Governor told the men that they were seeking the advice of an actuary as to whether payments to the miners from the fund could be increased, and he agreed to the men having greater control over the fund, the present value of the fund being £61,492 14s 7d Mr Bainbridge said that the men had exaggerated the problem over the ore left unwashed, but this would be overcome by

paying by the fathom. He confirmed that the men would be able to work as much as they wished without being penalised, as this would also benefit the Company. He informed them that had a rise of 4d been given to the washer boys in early spring it would have cost the Company £2,299.¹⁰ The minutes of the company for the 4 June 1872. recorded; "The Governor and Mr Wigram were thanked for undertaking the visit to the North in order to communicate with the Company's workmen with reference to their complaints and application for increased wages." A meeting took place on 1st June between the miners and Mr Birch the Governor of the Company.¹¹

"On Saturday morning, a conference took place between Mr Birch, the governor of the London Lead Company's court of directors, and the general body of the locked out miners at Middleton in Teesdale. Before the holding of the conference which was fixed to take place at eleven o'clock the men assembled in large numbers on "The Hill," and decided after some conversation to leave their case in the hands of the delegates. The men then proceeded to the Lead Company's Schoolroom, when they were met by Mr Birch, who was accompanied by Mr Wigram (barrister), Mr R W Bainbridge (local superintendent), Mr C Bainbridge, and a few other gentlemen.

"The Governor, after referring to the last time he had the pleasure of meeting a large body of Teesdale miners, which was under much happier auspices, said it had always been the principle of the court to act fairly towards the men. It was never intended by the court that any one of them should get himself irrecoverably into debt. It should not be forgotten, however, on the part of the men, that the company had of late not been successful. During the past two years, they had been obliged to take a paltry 10s a share out of a little reserve fund they had to distribute, and he was not aware that they had discharged a single workman during their period of depression. He related to them the history of what he knew of the present movement, and read extracts from a lengthened correspondence between himself and Mr Bainbridge, to show that it had been the desire of the court to do their utmost for the welfare of the men, and that no time had been lost in considering the position for an advance of "lent" money. A few days afterwards, on the 23rd of May, he received a letter from the men thanking the court for the increase of subsistence money, which had been granted. He confessed he was considerably surprised on reading a newspaper with an account of a mass meeting of the men on the previous Saturday, the 27th of May. He never thought there could have been so much injustice shown towards the company, and he pointed out fallacies which he could not believe the majority of the men could agree with. The governor referred to other suggestions made at the mass meeting and denied nearly the whole of them, adding that the company's wish was to deal fairly with their men in every way. With respect to the education of the miner's children, he said the school in which they were assembled cost the company £2,000. As to the washer boy's strike it appeared to him exceedingly hard that their fathers and others connected with them should be locked out in consequence of the step they had taken. But it was one of those things that could not be avoided, and until the ore in the team was washed up, they could not get any more out of the mines. There was one point on which he differed from Mr Bainbridge, when he said that there was work for the single men, but none for the parents of the boys on strike. That was very unjust. The company had contributed about £10,000 towards the Miner's Fund, and as treasurers to the fund they had always allowed interest at the rate of 4 per cent per annum, whilst from their money in the Consols they were only receiving 3 per cent.

"A petition from the men was handed to Mr Birch, in which they asked - "1. That £1 per week be the basis of our bargains. - 2. That we have, as you have already kindly granted, 54s per month subsistence money. - 3. That the money be advanced monthly over and above the 54s when earned, which Mr Bainbridge, our superintendent, has always consented to advance if required. - 4. That the working hours be reduced from eight to seven per day. - 5. That the starting point of the washer boys wages be 10d instead of 8d per day at twelve years of age, and to be raised at the rate of no less than an average of 3d per day per year. The boys at present employed being advanced accordingly. - 6. That the hours of labour be reduced six per week."

"The Governor said he was quite surprised at such a petition after the one they had so recently presented requesting an advance of "lent" money, and one or two other matters which the court at a considerable sacrifice had granted. They had written a letter thanking the company for the concessions made and yet within a week they were presenting again another petition. If they thought the court was going to be influenced in that way they were mistaken. It was unfair to think that because they had granted one thing they were going to grant another. He considered that when they gave 10s advance, they made a considerable concession. To the request that £1 per week would be the basis of their bargains, he emphatically said it would not be given. Of course, if they did not like a bargain they were not obliged to take it. The company were not taskmasters. They were not slave drivers. The men could take a bargain or leave it alone. With regard to the worth of the washer boys, it had been suggested that the company should revert to the old method of letting the washing by public competition, which would not be done; and as to the request for reducing the number of working hours he did not think it was fair, as it was an equivalent to an increase of wages."

"After a few words from Mr Parkin, the chairman, in which he said the boys going on strike had thrown them into confusion again, but however much some might at first attribute blame to the parents in not controlling their children and sending them back to work, he thought that idea would have subsided, seeing that it was the duty of every father and son to try and earn as much as would keep them out of debt, for the good old book said "owe no man any thing."

"Mr Birch said he had already stated the course the company intended to pursue; and with a few speeches from some of the delegates the conference terminated."

"A meeting of the men was afterwards held and it was arranged to hold another mass meeting."

"On Thursday, a mass meeting of the miners now locked out in Teesdale was held in the long room of the Rose and Crown Inn, Middleton in Teesdale. There was a large attendance, the room being crowded to excess. Mr Wm. Parkin, presided, and spoke at some length on the necessity of looking emigration in the face unless their demands were conceded. He was followed by several other miners, and at the close of the proceedings a series of resolutions were adopted, pledging the men and washer boys to remain out until the Lead Company agreed to make £1 a week instead of 17s 6d the amount paid at present the basis of the "bargains." It was also resolved that a deputation of three miners should proceed to London, to lay their grievances before the Governor, in consequence of the men having been refused a private interview by Mr Birch, when he was down at Middleton last week. On the

meeting breaking up a collection was made to defray the expenses of the deputation."

On the 6th of June notices were put up by the Company that the bargains would be let on the 10th June, and any miner not taking up his old place would be considered to have refused it, and it would be let to others. They were further angered to here that the Company's workmen in the mills had been awarded pay rises of 2s to 6s per week. Anger was also expressed that two Weardale miners had taken advantage of the strike and taken bargains in Teesdale. It was said by a number of men that rather than give in to the Company they would leave the dale and seek employment elsewhere. On the 6th of June notices were put up by the Company that the bargains would be let on the 10th June, and any miner not taking up his old place would be considered to have refused it, and it would be let to others. The men met on the 7th June to discuss the visit of Mr Birch, they decided to continue their struggle. They were further angered to here that the Company's workmen in the mills had been awarded pay rises of 2s to 6s per week. Anger was also expressed that two Weardale miners had taken advantage of the strike and taken bargains in Teesdale. It was said by a number of men that rather than give in to the Company they would leave the dale and seek employment elsewhere.¹²

The minutes of the 11 June 1872 record the receipt of a letter from William Parkin.

"A letter from William Parkin dated June 7th requesting an interview for a deputation with reference to the miners strike in Teesdale was read.

"Resolved that the secretary be ordered to write a letter in reply refusing the request. The Governor and Mr Wigram having visited the North recently with the special object of inquiring into said strike."

In the Hexham Courant of the 1 June 1872 the meeting of the Nenthead miners is recorded.

"A meeting of the lead miners of the district was held in the Band room, at Nenthead on Thursday week, for the purpose of deliberating upon the action to be taken in order to secure better remuneration for their labour. The meeting resulted in the formation of a committee of twenty and out of that number a select committee of eight were delegated to confer with the resident agent J D Millican Esq. of Nenthead house. The first conference took place on Friday night at the offices, the delegates being very courteously received by Mr Millican, who expressed himself warmly attached to the workmen, and nothing would be lacking on his part to advance their welfare. The result of this interview was communicated to the miners at another meeting held on Tuesday night last. Six delegates from Garrigill attended this meeting and informed them that the Garrigill miners had resolved to stand by the conclusions arrived at by their Nenthead brethren. The meeting however could arrive at no resolution, and it was left to the committee assisted by the Garrigill committee to arrange matters as they deemed best. Our correspondent suggests that the committee should seek an interview with R W Bainbridge Esq. the superintendent of the works as that gentleman controls the rate at which the bargains are let. The attitude of the Nenthead and Garrigill men does not foreshadow a strike to which they are greatly opposed.

The markets have gone up and other companies are advancing 50s and 72s under the same royalty, which has lowered the duty on the ore but the men, do not participate in the boon. The men, adds our correspondent must be united in their

efforts to secure a greater amount of lent money and £1 per week on which to base their bargains. At present the standing wage is 15s 9d; surely they should have advanced the odd 3d. The miners should have the same privileges as those obtained by their brethren in Teesdale."

On the 15th June, another mass meeting was held and resolved to continue the strike; the committee had received donations from the public, which would enable the miners to leave the area and look for work elsewhere. Members of the committee had visited collieries near Bishop Auckland, finding that there was plenty of work available, hewers could earn between 6s and 8s per day and the boys who had been earning 1s 6d a day washing lead could earn 4s a day.

The Alston Moor and Nenthead miners had not gone on strike and had taken their bargains and received the 54s subsistence. Mr Parkin said of them that, *"they appeared to be skulking behind the baggage wagons, whilst the Teesdale men had been in front of the battle"*. The washer boys at Alston Moor and Nenthead had also not gone on strike, and they had been promised a rise. The Company's work force at Nenthead and Alston Moor were less well off than their counterparts in Teesdale, the mines were not doing well, there was little or no other work available in the area and they had no direct rail link. This meant that they were very reliant on the Company and could not afford to risk strike action.¹³

"Upon Mr Bainbridge, the Company's superintendent arriving at Nenthead on Thursday for the purpose of arranging the bargains, opinions for the rates given by the viewers were awaiting him. Delegates from the body of miners called upon him, and presented a petition praying for the same privileges which had been or might in the future be granted to the Teesdale miners be extended to them. They stated that on the Company's workmen finding the "strike" among the Teesdale washer boys was in danger of imitation by their boys, a general meeting was held whereat they agreed that their boys should not "strike", but continue under a confidence that the masters would give them as high an increase of wages at their Autumn fixing as circumstances allowed. Mr Bainbridge at once frankly told them that the Company's Court intended that the increased monthly subsistence advances granted on the Teesdale application should apply to their other districts, and that the right minded action of the men of Alston Moor in respect of their boys tended to confirm him in the disposition to give the boys the contemplated double rise in the years wages intimated at the Middleton meeting on the 1st inst.; and that the protective new condition against "strikes" which had been inserted into the bargains for Teesdale and Weardale (and accepted by the latter) would also cover the Alston Moor district.

The result of this conference appeared on the ensuing day when every person came forward and took the bargains offered."

After the meeting on the 15th at Teesdale, Mr Monkhouse agent to Mr T Hutchinson Mr Scarth agent for the Duke of Cleveland tried to mediate on behalf of the miners with Mr Bainbridge, but they received no concessions. Subsequently arrangements were made for a number of men to start the following Monday as coal miners, labourers, game keepers, plate layers, and railway porters in various places in South Durham.¹⁴

The Northern Echo of Wednesday the 19th June 1872 reported the *"Exodus of Teesdale miners,"* saying that nearly 800 miners had left Middleton by train the previous morning. It was further reported that more men would be leaving that day and that all those who had left earlier had obtained jobs at good wages and within

easy reach of the railway, so they would be able to return home at weekends. There were two more reports in the Hexham Courant relevant to the strike

6 July 1872

“On Saturday 26 Teesdale miners who lately declined the renewal of their bargains - all let with the like intention in the Company’s Weardale Bollilhope Mines - were paid the balance of their earnings since October last. Which amounted on the average to 20s 6d per week per man. Upon analysing the account, it was found that the individual weekly earnings were as follows:

<i>Two above</i>	<i>29s per week</i>
<i>Two above</i>	<i>28s per week</i>
<i>One above</i>	<i>24s per week</i>
<i>Five above</i>	<i>22s per week</i>
<i>Four above</i>	<i>21s per week</i>
<i>Two above</i>	<i>19s per week</i>
<i>One above</i>	<i>18s per week</i>
<i>Two above</i>	<i>17s per week</i>
<i>One above</i>	<i>16s per week</i>
<i>Four above</i>	<i>14s per week</i>
<i>Two above</i>	<i>13s per week”</i>

20 July 1872

“Through the mediation of Mr W T Scarth chief agent to His Grace the Duke of Cleveland an amicable settlement was come to on Saturday between Mr Bainbridge the Lead Company superintendent, and the miners delegates. The men are to resume work on 20s per week average, instead of 20s per week basis, as asked for and the miner’s bargains are in future to be by the fathom instead of per bing of lead (8cwt) as hitherto. On Sunday evening a band of music paraded the streets of Middleton in Teesdale, and very general satisfaction was expressed amongst all classes at the termination of the prolonged struggle.”

This was not ratified by the miners until after a mass meeting held on Saturday the 20th July 1872, when it was stated that the miners had also succeeded in having their dissatisfaction over the running of the miners fund settled, and they had succeeded in getting a more ready money system adopted, and instead of obtaining their money after 12 months, they were now to get it quarterly, or monthly if they wished. They had also received an increase of 2s 6d in their monthly subsistence, this rose from 51s 6d to 54s. The wages of the washer boys were increased 6d, 8d, and 1s on their previous earnings; in addition, the boys’ hours of working had been reduced by 6 hours a week.

On the 27 July, the miners met in Middleton in Teesdale to discuss the settlement.

“A settlement of the long pending dispute between the Teesdale miners and their employers has been arrived at. The meeting at which this result was accomplished was held at the Cross-Key’s Hotel, Middleton in Teesdale on Saturday evening last. Mr W. Parkin presiding. Four of the delegates were chosen to wait upon Mr Bainbridge to fix for letting bargains. On their return, it was announced that bargains would be let on Monday morning, at nine o’clock, to all the workmen who wished them.

"The following resolutions were passed: -

"1st That the men resume work under the conditions laid down by Mr Bainbridge.

"2nd That every man give to the protection committee a just and truthful account of his earnings, not later than one month after the expiration of each quarters bargains, at the same time stating the mine he works at, and who his Overmen is.

"3rd That the working hours of the boys be six hours per week less than they have been working.

"4th That there be no rate of wages decided by the committee, but that the parents and the boys themselves hire to the best advantage.

*"5th That every boy give to the protection committee a just and truthful account of his earnings at the end of each year, not later than the last day of January in the year following, stating which mine he works at and who his masters are."*¹⁵

There was a meeting of the miners at Nenthead on the 15 April 1873; this meeting was called to discuss a request for an increase in the monthly subsistence. The miners were very aware of the state of the lead trade and this request was probably provoked by a recent increase in the price obtained for lead.

YearPrice of lead per ton

1866	£23	10s	0d
1867	£23	0s	0d
1868	£21	0s	0d
1869	£19	15s	0d
1870	£21	0s	0d
1871	£21	4s	0d
1872	£23	0s	0d
1873	£25	5s	0d
1874	£23	10s	0d

Figures from the Court minutes of the London Lead Company

*"The lead miners of Nenthead working under the London Lead Company held a mass meeting on Tuesday evening last, in order to ascertain the best way of trying to better their circumstances, the present monthly pay of £2 14s being considered too little to live upon, at the present high rate of provisions, &c. It was resolved to draw up a petition to be signed by the lead miners, asking that the monthly pay be raised so as to place them at least, on an equal footing with the other lead miners of the district. The Lead Company's miners at Nenthead are not paid so much as the miners employed by other companies. There are three different mines worked in the same village, belonging to different Company's and they are all paying the men £4 per month, some of them having got this sum without asking for it. It was considered also that the London Lead Company ought to see that their workmen were paid for doing their work, as their mines are far richer than the others are."*¹⁶

In the Hexham Herald dated 10 May 1873 the following letter was sent to the editor for publication.

"Sir The miners of Nenthead and Alston Moor district after holding two mass meetings, formed a committee to draw up a petition and get it signed for presentation by J J Millican Esq., resident agent, to R W Bainbridge Esq., Middleton, head Superintendent, for an increase of advance cash monthly from £2 14s to £4, also stating the wishfulness of the miners should be let on the basis of £1 per week. A

few have been making more than that sum. The petition was duly presented by Mr Millican to Mr Bainbridge, who courteously said that, if they persisted in their demands, he would forward them to London, but he was afraid it would make a bad job of it, and lead the Company to close the mines altogether; a fear which I think is groundless. They might do so, and, if they did, they could not keep them closed long, as the Lord of the Manor would compel them either to work them or give them up. There is plenty however, in the event of such being the case, ready to take them up. ... A mass meeting, however will be held tonight (Wednesday the 7th inst.) when no doubt, resolutions will be passed for Mr Bainbridge to send the petition to London. ... I am &c. ZETA"

There is not a record of any response to this petition in the Court minutes or in the press of the time. It would have been very unlikely that the men would have been granted a pay rise, as at this time the industry was beginning to come under pressure from foreign imports of lead. In 1878, the price obtained for a ton of lead had fallen to £22 5s 2d, and in 1885 it was only £11 7s 6d per ton.

The strike of the Beaumont Lead company workers is well documented in the Hexham Courant of this time, on the 30 March 1872 it was reported that there was great unrest among the miners of Weardale for an increase in their lent money (monthly subsistence).

"For some time past considerable dissatisfaction has prevailed among the miners of Weardale in consequence of the low rate of remuneration they received for their services, and they have determined at this period, having regard to the cost of living, now greatly upon the increase, to follow the example of other classes of workmen throughout the country and adopt a movement having for its object the advance of what is termed "lent money" a stated amount of cash guaranteed to his men by the employer monthly in order to meet the exigencies caused by the peculiar and uncertain nature of the work; and when, but for this "lent money" they would have frequently little or no earnings to draw.

"During the past summer an attempt was made to procure an advance from the £2 a month they are now receiving to £2 10s, and some negotiations were commenced which resulted in the formation of a committee of the men, and that committee appointed a deputation to wait upon the masters agent at the New House, and there lay before him what the men wanted. A short time elapsed, when the refusal from the masters was announced, the latter stating that the request could not be complied with, and a rumour got abroad that soon there would be a change in the system of working the mines, and a ready money method of payment to be introduced at some not far distant day. Matters quietly settled down from that time and things have gone on as usual to the present without any alteration being made. But the miners, latterly, seeing no prospect of their condition being improved, have again resolved to inaugurate an agitation for the increase of the lent money from 40s to 50s per month, and, on Saturday, a crowded and enthusiastic meeting of the W B lead miners was held in the Town Hall, St John's Chapel, Weardale, for the purpose of adopting resolutions in furtherance of the movement for increased pay. A thousand miners were computed to be present in the hall. ...

"THE CHAIRMAN (whose appointment was carried by acclamation) commenced the proceedings; and said: Nearly a quarter of a century had elapsed since a meeting similar to the present had been held at St John's Chapel. The object then was the same as at present - namely, a struggle for the increase in lent money. (Cheers)

Many connected with that movement had passed away; and not one now upon the platform beside him occupied the platform of the past. Since then things had gone on pretty smoothly, and no outward demonstration of lead miners had occurred in Weardale since that day. Every innovation in the shape of change had been received with good grace up to the present. It was during the last summer in June or July, that an attempt was made to procure a further advance of lent money. The request was very moderate, and nothing was said about the rise of wages. (Applause) All they asked for was an increase from 40s to 50s per month. The committee that was formed appointed a deputation to wait upon the master's agent, with a view to the miner's request. The reply shortly afterwards was that it could not be complied with, and matters in consequence were allowed to drop. But as no change had taken place since then, and great struggle between capital and labour had been going on throughout the country it was time he thought, they should do something for themselves. (Cheers) Many of the masters seemed to have anticipated the wants of their men, and did not wait till requested to shorten their hours of labour or advance their wages, and give them then what they thought they should have. (Cheers) But the lead miners of Weardale had had nothing advanced to them except provisions, coals &c., which latter had considerably advanced, and many a poor man with only £2 a month could not see his way clear to secure a load of coals, and other things were rising in proportion, so that the men were compelled to make another effort. Six or seven weeks ago that effort was commenced, and it was arranged that the deputation of the men should see the masters, but before that it was announced to have also a mass meeting of the men. The masters then sent word for the deputation to appear at Newhouse, and the men were told that a scheme was in progress which was not complete, but when it was they would again send for the men and lay it before them. In consequence of that the mass meeting was put aside for the time being, and the men waited patiently for a new scheme. Resolutions were proposed and presented to the master's agent, but there was an answer from Mr Beaumont that he was determined to stand to the new system (to which as a whole, the men could not see their way clear), and rather than shrink from it would lay the mines in for two or three years. This seemed a very cold answer to moderate requests, especially as Mr Beaumont's workmen stood in a very different relation to that gentleman in the valley than many other classes of workmen did to their masters. (Applause) The miners of Weardale were a class of men that had not been gathered from the four quarters of the globe, as their very fathers were cradled in that valley, and for some time they could trace back their ancestors. Their grandfathers had wrought in the same mines and many a grandson was now working in the place of his forefathers at the present time - (Cheers) - so that the announcement to close the mines was very cold. The resolutions to be submitted for their approval or disapproval were founded on the petition sent to Mr Beaumont after the scheme was laid before the men, and he hoped the appointed speakers would have a fair hearing, and show to the outside public that the miners of Weardale knew how to conduct a mass meeting (Cheers). He then called upon the mover of the first resolution.

"A MINER the stepped forward and moved, "That we receive the new system, with the exception of an advance to the unfortunate miner to 50s per month." After referring to the high price of food and other necessaries he said the men could not do with their small earnings, and they wished to show the reasonableness of their request. ...

“THE MOVER of the second resolution advanced to the front of the platform and said he was called upon to move. “That the miners cannot see their way clear to work without some degree of certainty, monthly, as there is so much irregularity in mining, unforeseen circumstances are such that they might have to work for two or three months without making anything, and this they cannot afford, and therefore they have again decided to appeal to the managers of the W B lead mines, Weardale. The object of their meeting together he said was to give public expression to their opinions on the new system. ...”

Examples were then given of the unpredictability of lead mining, and how it was that a lead miner may work for long periods without raising very much ore, but with the hope that they would strike a rich load of ore, so that they would be able to redeem the subsistence they had received.

“The speaker then said he failed to see how the workmen were to get fair play with the ready money system, except they had so much per fathom or ton for their work, and it to be weighed at the level mouth, so that a man could get what he made, and have the liberty also to remove elsewhere if not satisfied. But through sheer necessity, perhaps, he happened to be unfortunate two or three months, and could not meet the demands of his creditors, and they would refuse to speculate longer with him and his uncertainties and in all probability, he would have to leave his country without a shilling in his pocket to get work elsewhere, where he would be more fairly remunerated for his toil, (Applause.) The proposed ready money system was wrong for both men and master. ...

“THE SECONDER of the resolution stood up to address the meeting ... with respect to the ready money system, it favoured the masters too much at the men’s expense. It obliged the men to give their labour, and left him open to advance the unfortunate miner what he pleased. It chilled the spirit of enterprise in searching for lead ore, and placed a man too much at the mercy of one individual. ...

The resolution was carried amid great applause, and the large meeting separated with a vote of thanks to the chairman.”

The next mass meeting of the miners occurred on the 13 April at St. John’s Chapel. This meeting was due to have started at 12 noon but was delayed until one o’clock to allow those miners who had long distances to travel to get to the meeting. Many of the miners had walked a great distance to be there some over eight miles but despite this over 1,500 people were at the meeting.¹⁷

“MR NATHAN RACE occupied the chair, and in opening the proceedings said he could not help but on that occasion returning the meeting thanks for their kindness in again choosing him to preside over the present one...

“They had at last secured an interview with Mr Beaumont, and that interview was satisfactory so far. They could not accomplish all that was desired but ultimately the dispute would be settled. At the mass meeting held on the 23rd of March he (the speaker) made a statement to the effect that Mr Beaumont had said he was prepared to stand by the new system and that rather than shrink from it he would throw the mines in. Now he was happy to tell the meeting that day that that statement made on the 23rd of March was not true. When he (the chairman) uttered those words he firmly believed they were true; the committee believed they were true; and there was no doubt but that every workman in the WB lead mines believed those words were true. But he heard the other night from Mr Beaumont’s own lips that that gentleman

had never said he would fling the mines in, nor ever dreamt of flinging them in for two or three years. But he wished it to be thoroughly understood by the meeting that he had every confidence in Mr Featherstone Philipson, who had communicated the intelligence to the committee. (Hear hear) ... There would he believed, soon be a settlement brought about, but in the meantime, they were struggling for the 50s a month lent money, and they would have it. (Great applause)

“MR JOSEPH WATSON, Hasswicks, Westgate. Up to that time they had been battling with the new system, which seemed to have been a bubble blown by one man, and which burst in his own hand on that memorable night. (Laughter and cheers) Mr Beaumont said he never wished to push any new system upon them, and to use his own words, “they had been fighting with the wind.” But the new system was held up to them as an absolute reality by Mr Cain, and as one which would come into operation at the beginning of the present quarter. They therefore, never went to Newhouse to take their bargains on Monday last. He heard Mr Cain say that Mr Beaumont was willing to let the men have the benefit of the mines for two or three years in the hope of something better turning up in the future, but that he was not prepared to suffer any loss by the mines. Since this, however, he had heard Mr Beaumont declare that he never said anything of the kind, and never thought so. (Loud cheers) Mr Featherstone Philipson said that Mr Cain told him that Mr Beaumont would close the mines for two or three years rather than grant 50s lent money, or shrink from the “new system.” But he himself heard Mr Beaumont say that he never said so, and never even dreamt of such a thing - (cheers) - and he wrote out a declaration to that effect, and declared that it might be published to the world. As regard to the promised interview he believed Mr Beaumont knew nothing about it till the Monday, when he found the letter sent by the committee, and that he then went to Newhouse on Wednesday; but he heard Mr Cain tell the deputation twice in one interview that if the men had not confidence in their master the sooner they parted the better. (Laughter) Another contradiction he might refer to was an equally glaring one. When the deputation were up some time ago hearing the document read, Mr Cain told them that lead had fallen £2 per ton during the last two or three years, and was still tending downwards in price. Well they introduced the subject on Wednesday evening to Mr Beaumont, and told him that they knew from good authority - from a person of their acquaintance, who did business in lead that the value had risen £2 per ton during the past twelve months. In reply to that Mr Beaumont said he must admit that lead had an upward tendency. ...

“Mr WILLIAM GIBSON, of Hasswicks, Westgate. At the interview on Wednesday with Mr Beaumont he was exceedingly happy to ascertain that the gentleman was not, in point of fact their enemy. They found that their true and real enemy was Mr Cain. He had the impression that Mr Beaumont was a gentleman; he received the deputation very courteously, and listened to all they had to say with great patience, and answered nearly all that came before him in a straightforward and honourable way indeed. Mr Beaumont told them that he had long been of opinion that a little ready money in Weardale would be a very acceptable thing. No miner objected to getting plenty of ready money. Mr Beaumont told them that he had never thought of pushing the new system against the wishes of the men. ...

“MR WILLIAM EMMERSON, of Westgate ... There was a sort of agreement or understanding, existing between the agents of Mr Beaumont and certain neighbouring employers say, for instance, the iron stone mines. So that it was necessary for a man to have his clearance, which is often refused by Mr Cain on the

plea that a working man had no right to one. ("Mr Cain is not a man") So for Mr Beaumont to be their last employer was sufficient with but few exceptions to debar men from getting work until they had been elsewhere working, either east, west, north, or south, within seven miles of where that meeting was being held. That was tyranny. (Hear hear)

"MR JOHN FEATHERSTONE, Middle Rigg. ... The price of living had so much increased since those days (when Mr Sopwith was agent) that it had become necessary that there should be a general advance of wages, and he was glad that their master, Mr Beaumont, was willing to grant it. They would observe that he (the speaker) was in favour of the system of ten percent, as introduced by Mr Sopwith, only he would have it to take place after the miner had earned £1 per week instead of 15s. That was like each man helping his brother. ... Mr Beaumont had not thought of the system of paying the miners monthly. He never approved of it; first, because there was a deal of ground that was not payable in three months. Plenty of lengths in the Burtree Pasture Mine were not payable in three months; and not only there but in all other mines, there was unproductive ground that had to be cut through. Secondly, in the high part of Weardale there were seasons when it would be impossible to get it washed up for months, and it would cause endless difference when the work was to be valued. Thirdly, there would be far more wood used, making a greater cost, as well as rendering the mines more unsafe; and in fact, the mines would be ruined, because it would destroy all enterprise on the part of the miners, which enterprise was of more value to Mr Beaumont and the landed proprietors and tradesmen of the dale, and to all who were interested in it, than all the agents, that ever were at Newhouse since the days of old Maughan. (Loud cheers)..."

The following resolutions were then put to the meeting, and carried by unanimous vote, amid great enthusiasm.

"First, "That no 'bargain' be taken at Newhouse until the 50s lent money be granted."

Second, "That £1 be the standard to base the 'bargain' upon, and no man to be percented till he makes that sum."

Third, "That the thanks of this meeting be given to Mr Beaumont for the gentlemanly manner in which he received the deputation."

The "Percent System" was introduced in 1845 when Thomas Sopwith took over as agent of the Beaumont Company mines he increased the bargain rate so as to give an average wage of 15s a week, and raised the monthly subsistence to 40s. It was also decided that miners who were in debt at the end of the year would in future only be responsible for half their arrears. The other half was to be met by those miners who earned more than the 15s per week. These miners were to have 10 percent of their excess earnings deducted from their end of year settlement of pay. So a miner earning for example 30s per week on average would contribute 78s in that year (10 per cent of 15s x 52 weeks) to help pay off half the debt of the less fortunate miners. If these "percent" payments did not meet the amount owed the Beaumont Company would cover the remaining amount.

The "New System" suggested was that the miners were to work for £3 per bing of ore raised, and that money which they earned was to be paid at the end of the month (ready money). The miners were to be paid a month in arrears, that is they would have to work two months before they received their first payment for one month. The miners found this system to be unacceptable and at the mass meeting examples

were given why this was so. "The ready money system with £3 per bing seemed all very well; but there were many mines where if they had £6 a bing they could not make way, and no man could work for a whole quarter of a year and make no money - merely depending on future success. A partnership might set to work in any mine and work very well; and yet they might work a month or eight weeks without making what would pay for a "charge." What would the ready money system do for men in such a case."

On the 20 April 1872, another mass meeting of the Beaumont miners took place in Weardale, to hear what their delegates had achieved following a meeting with the management of the company.¹⁸

"... The fifty shillings lent money was granted- (cheers) - that £1 a week to be the basis of the bargains was granted - (cheers) - and that the percentage system was to be entirely swept away - (cheers) -..."

This could well have been the end of the strike, but, in a letter from Mr Beaumont to Mr Cain published in the Durham Chronicle, Mr Beaumont had stated to Mr Cain that he was thoroughly satisfied of his single-mindedness of purpose, and of the truth of all his statements both to him and the men. This to the miners implied that Mr Beaumont was saying that the miner's delegates had in fact misled the men. The letter referred to was as follows:

144, Piccadilly, London, 16th April, 1872

"Dear Sir, From what took place at the Weardale mass meeting, I infer that the lead miners think that you proposed the new system without my cognisance. Now, it must be clearly understood that the whole scheme had my entire approval, and that it was put before the deputation of miners with my sanction. It was originally intended, as a ready money system, in the interests of the men; but as it meets with little favour, and will be much more difficult to work out than was first anticipated, I have had little hesitation in authorising its withdrawal.

"It is hardly necessary for me to add that there never was nor, is there, the slightest difference of opinion between us; and that I am thoroughly satisfied of your single mindedness of purpose, and of the truth of all your statements, both to me and to the men. Those who think I can accept compliments at your expense are quite mistaken and little know me. Believe me, as always, yours very truly.

"Wentworth B Beaumont"

On the 17th April Mr Beaumont sent another letter to Mr Cain in which he concedes to the wishes of the men.

144, Piccadilly, London, 17th April, 1872

"Dear Sir, I am very glad to observe from the resolutions passed at the meeting of miners last Saturday that the good feeling which has so long subsisted in Weardale is still unimpaired, and I have therefore felt the greatest pleasure in approaching the present unhappy differences, with a full desire to meet fairly the difficulties as change of time and circumstances may require some modification of arrangements which have existed for about a quarter of a century.

"Having come to a conclusion clear and definite in my own mind, I will not delay informing you that there is no longer any objection on my part to give the men fifty

shillings a month lent money; the standard basis of all bargains being one pound per week, instead of fifteen shillings as at present. There is so much complication and difficulty about the percentage system that it will be better to abolish it altogether after next June; it is questionable in principle, and does not exist (so far as I know) in any other mines.

"As I am detained here on a Parliamentary committee, I cannot explain my views personally to the men; but I think it right to state that the decision at which I have arrived has been mainly influenced by advice and assistance derived from yourself. You have always acted with loyalty and kindly feeling towards the men; and I am perfectly confident that what has been recently said against you at the miners meeting is the result of unfortunate misunderstanding, and that good will and peace will be speedily restored in our mining districts among all parties. Believe me, very truly yours.

"W B Beaumont"

MR NATHAN RACE, chairman. ... He must say that in the Durham letter Mr Beaumont wanted to clear Mr Cain, and expressed to him his entire concurrence in that new system which was laid before the men. (Hisses) Now, he must say that staggered him (the chairman) more than everything else he had heard, because he happened to be one of the deputation who waited upon Mr Beaumont at Newhouse, and distinctly heard him say that there was no new system; he never intended that any new system should be brought before the men, and they had been battling with the wind, and so on. (Laughter) And he (the chairman) was struck when he read in the Durham letter that that the new system had his entire approval. (Hisses) If they would read the fore end of Mr Beaumont's letter to the committee, and the back end of his Durham letter, they would observe that there was such a contradiction, as he never saw in his life. (Applause) At the fore end of the miners committee letter he praised their loyalty, and said he was pleased that the good feeling which had existed for such a long time in Weardale was still unimpaired - (loud ironical laughter and cheers) - but at the back of the Durham letter he said he could not think of receiving compliments at the expense of Mr Cain. (Loud laughter and hisses) Now he (the chairman) thought there was a flat contradiction there. ... The deputation had told the men the truth and nothing but the truth and on that they took their stand. (Applause) The struggle had assumed a form which they never expected (hear, hear). He would far rather have been battling that day for the wage question than on that personal question. It was a question of character - (loud cheer) - although they were working men. ... The meeting would be aware that the committee were gathered together at once, after they got the document first read, and drew up three resolutions which they forwarded to Mr Cain, and a copy of which was also telegraphed to London to Mr Beaumont, as follows: -

1st. That the acceptance of Mr W B Beaumont's proposal, received to day, be held in abeyance until a proper understanding be arrived at between Mr Cain and the miners delegates.

2nd. That our character and that of our delegates has been falsified to such an extent that we cannot as honourable men submit to take any more bargains of Mr Cain until Mr Cain has fully cleared Mr Philipson and his co-delegates from all falsehood.

3rd. That if Mr Cain does not at once come forward and clear our delegates we must take legal proceedings, and let the law do that for us. (Loud cheers) He had received from Mr Cain the following reply: -

"Dear Sir, (laughter) I have received your letter of the 18th inst., with the resolutions passed at the miners committee meeting last evening, and which I will forward to Mr Beaumont by to-day's post. On receiving a reply from that gentleman I will again communicate with you. Meantime I remain dear sir, yours truly J C Cain."
(Laughter)

By to-day's post the committee had received the following letter from Mr Beaumont:

"144, Piccadilly, 19 April 1872

"Sir, - In reply to your telegram, I can only express a hope that calm consideration will lead you to receive the letter I sent on Wednesday in the kindly spirit in which it was written

I remain yours faithfully

"W B Beaumont"

There then followed a discussion as to what should be done next and the following resolutions were passed.

"1. That this meeting is perfectly satisfied with the past conduct of the committee and the select deputation, and hereby express its unbounded confidence in their honour and truthfulness, and consider them perfectly blameless in the complications which have taken place between the owner and the manager of the W B lead mines.

"2. That we request the owner of these mines to withdraw from the union which exists amongst the employers of labour in the neighbourhood for the purpose of preventing any miner obtaining employment who is necessitated or chooses to change his employment, as we consider the object of such union unfair and despotic to the workmen, and dishonourable to the employer.

"3. That we should appoint a miners standing committee, to consist of forty members, including chairman, treasurer, and secretary, whose duties shall be to watch over the interests of the workmen; and represent any grievances that may exist, between masters and men, to the owner of the mines; and that we the lead miners of the W B Mines do hereby promise, and sign our names to support to our utmost ability the aforesaid committee.

"4. That fifty shillings a month be granted to men who work one month whether fortunate or unfortunate, without exception.

"5. That as a bargain is an engagement entered into between two parties, that it in future be conducted on the principle of contracting, pure and simple; and not by dictation as has been in the past.

"6. That advertisements be inserted in all the local papers, asking that subscriptions in aid of our movement be sent to their respective offices."

A meeting of the Allendale miners held at the miner's room at Allenheads on the 24 April 1872, to discuss the offer made by Mr Beaumont to increase their wages.¹⁹

"The meeting was of a very enthusiastic character, and many points in the past history of the mining enterprises of this district were very ably adverted to men with locks white with age were moved with animation as they contrasted the present with the past, and scarcely could find the language to express their grateful feelings for the almost unprecedented advance of wages now so kindly granted them. Many whose long lives have been spent amongst the surrounding heath clad hills alluded to the strong attachment they felt to their native place, and referred in glowing terms to the Beaumont family, in whose service they, and their grand-sires had been exclusively engaged. Though for some time past the earnings of lead miners have not been subject to those fluctuations and migrations which are so common in other fields of industry, and their constant employment seemed to them as an equivalent to wage in the long run. A fixity of residence amongst the scenes and associations of their earliest days materially enhances and greatly contributes to their general contentment in their secluded sphere of labour, and strangers from the din and bustle of town life cannot but admire their neat and comfortable-looking homesteads, and be led to eulogise their immunities. The advance of wages now offered on the standard basis for bargains is over 33 per cent, and taking the abolition of the percentage system into consideration may be deemed in the aggregate an augmentation seldom surpassed in the history of trade. The meeting not only gave their expressions of good feeling towards Mr Beaumont, but also to the resident agent Mr Curry, whose uniform kindness and attention to their wishes has been unremitting, and who without any ostentation has taken every opportunity to secure to them any real benefit. This good feeling and understanding that exists between him and the workmen will ever tend to inspire confidence and united effort to promote the interest of their employer, Mr Beaumont. The following resolutions were unanimously passed and ordered to be sent to Mr Beaumont:

"Sir, It is with the greatest of pleasure and satisfaction that we, the undersigned on behalf of the whole of your employees in the Allenheads mining district take this mode of conveying to you the following resolutions unanimously passed at a public meeting of miners, &c., held at Allenheads, 24th April 1872.

"1st. That the intimation (communicated through our respected resident agent, John Curry, Esq.) of the definite and substantial manner in which you have so generously proposed to improve our position merits the deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks of all your employees in this section of your mining district.

"2nd. That the increase of monthly subsistence money to 50s to contract men, together with the £1 per week as the standard basis of all bargains, and the liberal remuneration of every other class of labourers, accompanied with the great benefit of payment in full each month are boons which cannot be too highly appreciated, and for which we wish to tender to you our most sincere thanks.

"3rd. That the kindly sentiments - or what may be more properly termed loyalty - which have ever been cherished towards yourself and family by the inhabitants of this district will, if possible, be more strong and binding after the generous expression of your liberality and considerate efforts to promote the welfare of your workmen."

The settlement of the strike was reported in the press on the 4 May 1872.²⁰

"On Monday last, the deputation of Weardale miners had an interview with Mr Beaumont's lead agent Mr Cain, in order to arrange the details, as Mr Beaumont wished in connection with the resolution passed at the mass meeting on the 20th ult., and so bring the three week's strike to a satisfactory settlement. In the evening, the

whole of the 34 delegates who represent the workmen of the mines known as Pasture Grove, Killhope, Grove Rake, Boltsburn, Stanhope Burn, Green Laws, Slitt &c. met at the committee room, St John's Chapel, to consider the arrangements made by the head agent and the deputation of eight of their number. On these arrangements being laid before them, they were heartily approved of, and all was consequently settled up in a satisfactory manner. The strike of Weardale miners is thus now finally closed. Before the committee rose, a hearty vote of thanks was given to the press for the full and impartial manner, which the proprietors have reported the proceedings in which the miners have been engaged. The miners took their bargains at the W B office, at Newhouses, on Thursday and yesterday, and work will be resumed on Monday. Hitherto the wage men or those who work for wages at the W B Lead mines have been receiving subsistence money monthly like the pickmen, and lifting the balance at the half yearly pays. In future these workmen will be paid off once a month."

The attempt by the management to get rid of the "lent" money system at this time did not succeed, but, the Weardale bargain books show a change to the method of paying subsistence to the miners beginning with the bargains let on the 1st April 1875. In these it was said that the "money to be advanced according to quantity of ore raised". This new wording did not apply to all bargains, but only those that were to work "old ground," or poor ground.²¹

"1st April 1875 Slitt"

"Thomas Furnail 2prs agree to raise ore in old ground east of Slitt shaft @ 50/- per bing - Money to be advanced according to quantity of ore raised - till 30th June 1875."

"1st April 1875 Greenlaws"

"Mark Nattras 4prs agree to raise ore in their old ground at 50/- per bing - Money to be advanced according to quantity of ore raised."

"1st April Boltsburn"

"Tho. Middleton 4prs agree to rise 1 fathom in Pattinson sill at £6 contract and raise ore at 50/- per bing - money to be advanced according to the quantity of ore raised."

This system continued through 1876 becoming more common by 1877, and in 1878 out of 107 bargains 69 were of this type.

In 1879, the bargains let on the 27th August show yet a further change, and all bargains were let according to ore raised, but also on a percent basis; the miners were "to be paid 80 percent monthly on this contract and the balances at the half yearly pay in July 1880."

"27 August 1879 Burtree pasture"

"Jos. Thompson 4 partners agree to raise ore in 6 fathoms of ground in Nich James length at 75s per ton of ore till the 31 December 1879 to be paid 80 per cent monthly on this contract and the balance at the half yearly pay in July 1880."

This method continued up to the closure of the mines by the Beaumont Company.

"6 January 1883 Grove Rake"

"Thompson Robinson 4 prs agree to raise ore in their old ground @ 90/- per ton of ore as directed or till 31st March 1883 to be paid 80 per cent monthly on this contract and the balance at the half yearly pay in December 1883."

This would mean that a miner who did not raise any ore would have received no subsistence, it is little wonder that the miners were so opposed to it.

Despite the fact that a settlement was reached not all the miners were happy and some still refused to take their bargains.

*"Notwithstanding the settlement that was recently come to between Mr Beaumont and his workmen, when all grievances were supposed to have been removed we are informed that there are still about 100 men off work in Weardale. During the first two days when the bargains were taken, all went on smoothly the prices being considered by the men generally fair and those who had taken these bargains resumed work at once. Unfortunately, during the two last bargain days, the prices offered to the miners were not nearly so good, and they were consequently refused. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst the men on this account, as they fancy that it has been a scheme on the part of the agent to get part to commence work, and so dissolve the unity which has hitherto existed. There is another point which has also been freely commented upon, viz., that those set to work at first are composed entirely of men who have votes, whilst those who are likely to be debarred from another month's subsistence money, are nearly all non-electors, and belong as a rule, to the poorer class of miners, who can worst afford to do without subsistence money. Their more fortunate brethren however are likely to resist this sort of treatment very bitterly. Already, meetings have been held in different mines, and a mass meeting is intended to be held shortly, and unless some satisfactory arrangement come to, another strike is likely to occur. The men who have not yet resumed work say that according to the scale of prices offered, they could not earn 10s per week; numbers are still continuing to leave the district."*²²

The Weardale miners had formed a committee whose job it was to look after the interests of the men, and to present any grievance they may have to the management. Their first meeting took place at the beginning of June 1872.²³

"The standing committee is formed by the men chosen by the miners of the different mines to represent them, and the miners of the W B lead mines, on the 20th April, in this year, signed their names to support to the utmost of their ability the said committee. After the selection of officers, it was resolved that the W B lead miners in Weardale subscribe at once 6d each towards the funds and it was resolved to open correspondence with the manager of the W B mines, and to point out to him "with feelings of deep regret, that such a number of men have been necessitated to leave their country, when a number of places are standing, and that the £3 per bing has not been generally given. We (the committee) think all men who are at work ought to have their "lent money". Their lateness of commencement of work was the managers blame and not theirs." Several other resolutions were passed, amongst which was that the next meeting be held on Saturday after next "bargain."

The unrest amongst miners working for the Beaumont Company continued, and the management were very concerned not to provoke another strike by their men. This is expressed in a letter from John Curry the agent at Allenheads in a letter to Mr W. B. Beaumont dated 19 March 1873.²⁴

"For some weeks past I have felt very uneasy from the effects of the late disturbed state of Weardale miners evidently making its appearance amongst your Allendale miners by Pickmen ceasing to keep in the mine the proper hours. Master Woodmen applying for further advance of wages, &c. &c. and having in a conciliatory manner exhausted all my reasoning powers with them and not deeming it prudent under the present agitated state of miners in general to use coercive measures without first having your instructions thereon as well as Mr Cain's views, consequently I wrote Mr Cain stating that I would like to have some consultation with him on mining matters if he would name the day and place for me to wait upon him. Mr Cain's reply was that he would be at this office on the 18th inst. (yesterday) which appointment was fulfilled. After having the case fully explained and discussed it appears that the Master Woodmen's wages and hours to be worked in the different districts are similar to each other, but as regards the Pickmen's hours to be worked, Mr Cain states that they never have been timed since he went to Weardale, neither has it been insisted in their bargains when let (since the time of the strike last year) to work five eight hour shifts per week per man also he (Mr Cain) recommends me to take your instructions at once as to whether under present circumstances you may approve of the Allendale Pickmen's bargains to be let, being made similar to those in Weardale (omitting the five eight hour shifts per man) as well as doing away with the time taking, or you wish matters to continue as they have been in your Allendale mines. Mr Cain's opinion as well as mine is that it might be judicious at the present time to make the two districts (Weardale and Allendale) similar to each other so far as regards the wording of bargains omitting the five eight hours per week per man, and cease time taking of miners but wait your instructions on these points. ..."

The result of this letter was that the bargains of the Allendale men let on the 29 March 1873 no longer had the instruction that they were to work eight hours per shift. Instead they simply stated that the men were to work five shifts. The unease of the management is further underlined by their readiness in July of 1873 to grant their men another increase in their subsistence money.²⁵

"On Saturday last, the quarterly meeting of the Weardale Miners Association Committee was held at St John's Chapel, at the Black Bull Inn. At their last meeting in April it was agreed "That they petition W B Beaumont Esq., MP. to advance them 10s per month 'lent money', and that the bargain be based upon 25s per week." The secretary acted accordingly to the wishes of the committee, their request for 10s advance per month, subsistence money was readily granted, through Mr Beaumont's chief agent, Mr J C Cain, but Mr Beaumont would not admit of any basis for bargains. The committee accepted the advance from 50s to 60s lent money with thanks, and conveyed their sentiments in a letter to Mr Cain, expressing their feelings of gratefulness to that gentleman and their employer, Mr Beaumont, for considering so generously the interests and welfare of their workman. The first £3 lent money will be advanced on July 25. Once upon a time the Weardale miners got a guinea per eight weeks to subsist upon. In the early part of this century they had 30s per month, on February 12, 1846, 40s per month was advanced, and on May 31, 1872, 50s."

The men working in the Beaumont Company's smelt mills at Allenheads and Rookhope went on strike to seek better terms from their employers in October 1873. This dispute was reported in the Hexham Herald.²⁶

"The whole of the men who were employed as separators at Mr Beaumont's Lead Works both at Allen Smelt works and Rookhope Mill, have come out on strike in

consequence of the non compliance with their request for an increase in wages. The workmen had 4s 3d for seven hour shifts. They now demand 5s for the same hours and the same work."

A meeting of the separators held on the 15 November was also reported.²⁷

"The Separators held a meeting on the 15th inst., when a deputation of three of their number was appointed to wait upon the agent (Mr W. J. Johnson) and ascertain if there was any likelihood of their terms being accepted. ... On Monday, the deputation waited on him, and explained the nature of their business to which he listened in good part, until the moot point at issue was touched, and when he said they knew his terms, and if they liked they could go in on them. After a good deal of discussion, W. Ridley, one of the deputation and one of the oldest workmen on the works, said if he would not listen to them they would go to the fountain head, and let Mr Beaumont know how the case really stands. The deputation then left, with the understanding that a petition explaining their case is to be drawn up and forwarded to Mr Beaumont for the gentlemen's consideration. Application, we understand has been made in several quarters for men to come and supply the places of those who have left, but without success, under present circumstances. We also hear of influences having been used in sundry places to stop employers from obtaining the services of those leaving Allendale."

On the 5 December 1873, the men held a meeting at which it was decided that they should return to work at the old terms, their strike had achieved nothing.

It was not only the London Lead Company and the Beaumont Company who had disputes with their men. In June 1872, a dispute was reported in the Hexham Courant between the Rodderup Fell company and their men.²⁸

"It would appear that the disaffection is to pervade nearly the whole of the extensive mining field comprised in the hilly regions of South Northumberland, North Durham and East Cumberland, for as one dispute or grievance is disposed of, another appears on the surface, so that few mines of any importance seem destined to escape the general discontent with things past and present. Things, which up to the present have been submitted to as a matter of course, and with scarcely a murmur, are now found to be insupportable, and redress is eagerly sought. This change is doubtless partly attributable to the additional pressure put upon the labouring classes by the great advances made in the prices of every-day necessities, such as house rent, firing, wearing apparel, and food, all having participated in the almost general advance. Thus, our mining population aver that, under present circumstances, their condition requires some amelioration, as what would do a few years since will not do now. A short time ago we mentioned the fact that Rodderup Fell Company had, unsolicited increased their workmen's lent or subsistence money from £2 to £2 10s per month, but it appears that this concession had been made on the understanding that the inside workmen were to stand five eight hour shifts per week, which some of the men say it is impossible to do in some of the lower workings. Since the advance in the amount of lent money things have apparently gone on smoothly, and the Rodderup Fell workmen have been looked upon as a docile and contented race of beings, but we are sorry to say a change has come over the face of things. On the last "len'ing day" it was found that the "len'ings" had undergone a process known as "clipping," or in other words, the amount advanced to each man had been reduced, not according to one uniform scale, but sums varying from 7^d to 2s 6d per week, and it is said that only two men's "len'ings" had escaped the "clipping" process. A

feeling of dissatisfaction having consequently sprung up amongst the men, a meeting was lately convened in a spacious chamber in the mine, when it was resolved to memorialise the masters with a view to having the system of "clipping len'ings" altogether abolished, it being a thing of which they as a body of workmen have the most unqualified abhorrence. A memorial has been drawn up and signed by most, if not all, of the inside workmen. They also request that the present system of long payments may have the careful consideration of their employers, and they likewise suggest the advantages, as well as the practicability, of half yearly instead of yearly pays. We are glad to know that the men, feeling aggrieved, have adopted the sensible course they have, as by a little negotiation there will be more likelihood of having the matter properly adjusted than if other means had been resorted to."

On the 20 July, the paper reported that the Rodderup Fell miners were on strike.

"A few weeks since we intimated that the Rodderup Fell miners were aggrieved on account of their subsistence money being reduced when they had not the prescribed number of shifts per month, and that a memorial had been drawn up for the purpose of being signed by the men and presented to the masters. At the same time, we expressed hope that an amicable settlement might be come to, but such has not been the case. The memorial was duly signed and presented; meetings of the men have been held with the local representatives of the company, without any settlement being come to. A deputation from the men had an interview with Mr Crawhall on the evening of Friday week, at the close of which the points of difference, so far as we have been able to ascertain were that the masters required the men to work 20 shifts per month, while the men would only guarantee to work 18. The men also wanted two weeks during hay time, without any reduction from the subsistence money, while they were offered one week, and if they stopped off longer, a portion of the subsistence money to be withheld. The men also objected to being required to acquaint the resident manager when they wanted a day from work. On Monday, there was a meeting of the men, from which meeting we have no report, but it must have been unfavourable as there has since been a lockout, a door having been placed on the mouth of the level, and the men are for the most part engaged at hay making."

The end of this dispute on the 16 August was reported in the Hexham Courant.

"On Friday last, the letting of the bargains usually held at the Rodderup Fell mines took place, when the men who had been out on strike for some time past accepted their bargains on the old, or as they term it, masters terms. The affair at the commencement created a great deal of excitement, and many were the conjectures that they would not be able to hold out, the masters barring the entrance to the mine, but we are informed that on the above named day the men took their bargains as usual without saying a word as to "clipped len'ings" or other grievances, so that the strike may be now considered ended."

¹ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 22nd July 1872. Newcastle City Library Local History Department.

² Hexham Courant 27th April 1872. Northumberland Record Office.

³ Ibid. 11th May 1872.

⁴ Northern Echo 27th May 1872. Darlington Library Local Studies.

⁵ London Lead Company Court Minutes. Northumberland Record Office LLC 32.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Northern Echo 27th May 1872. Darlington Library Local Studies.

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- ⁸ Hexham Courant 1st June 1872. Northumberland Record Office.
- ⁹ Northern Echo 27th May 1872. Darlington Library Local Studies.
- ¹⁰ Northern Echo 3rd June 1872. Darlington Library Local Studies.
- ¹¹ Hexham Courant 15th June 1872. Northumberland Record Office.
- ¹² Northern Echo 7th June 1872. Darlington Library Local Studies.
- ¹³ Hexham Courant 15th June 1872. Northumberland Record Office.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. 22nd June 1872.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. 3rd August 1872.
- ¹⁶ Hexham Herald 19th April 1873. Northumberland Record Office.
- ¹⁷ Hexham Courant 20th April 1872. Northumberland Record Office.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. 27th April 1872.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Hexham Courant 4th May 1872. Northumberland Record Office.
- ²¹ Weardale Bargain Books. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/5A/1 – 23.
- ²² Hexham Courant 25th May 1872. Northumberland Record Office.
- ²³ Ibid. 8th June 1872.
- ²⁴ NRO 2762/A41. Northumberland Record Office.
- ²⁵ Hexham Courant 26th July 1873. Northumberland Record Office.
- ²⁶ Hexham Herald 4th October 1873. Northumberland Record Office.
- ²⁷ Ibid. 22nd November 1873.
- ²⁸ Hexham Courant 15th June 1872. Northumberland Record Office.

Chapter 4

LEAD MINING DISPUTES 1879 TO 1899

In 1882, the miners who worked in the Beaumont mines in Weardale went on strike. For some time the miners had expressed their discontent at working the "New System" (previously described), but the situation was complicated by the dispute between the Ecclesiastical Commission and Mr W. B. Beaumont. This dispute was over the amount of rent that the Beaumont Company paid the commission for the use of the mines, because of the fall in price of lead the Beaumont Company had requested a reduction in these rents. The result of this was that the mines had been closed, or partly closed during 1878 and 1879, resulting in considerable distress among the miners and their families. On the 30 May 1879 the Weardale miners Committee wrote to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners asking for help.¹

"Sir

"On behalf of the Weardale lead miners committee I beg to call your attention to a few facts in order to show the present sad state of the Weardale miners and their families. It is well known that the mining population of the dale is a settled one. The present miners, (their fathers and their grandfathers before them also) having worked all their lives in these mines, never expected but that they would always have this employment. Consequently they are much attached to the place.

"Last June nearly half of the men were turned off, the rest being allowed to work on till December. The hope, which buoyed them up which has kept some from emigrating, that there was a chance of work being resumed soon, has nearly left them. This suffering and privations have been great and widespread. At a public meeting held at St John's Chapel they appointed a committee to act on their behalf. This committee deemed it their duty to ask Mr Beaumont if he was at liberty to give his reason for the stoppage of the works, whether there was any prospect of the mines being reopened soon. The reply has just been received "that it being impossible to work the lead mines (since the great fall in the price of lead) under the old arrangements with the lessors as to their rents. Mr Beaumont, last year requested a revision of the same, informing the Ecclesiastical Commissioners agents that he would be compelled to close the mines last December unless early consideration could be given to the matter" and that the commissioners "are willing to negotiate for a temporary reopening of the mines"

"It is only the province of the committee earnestly and respectfully to urge the commissioners to do something speedily as the destitution of the poor people is very great: and to express the humble hope that the obstacles in the way of a temporary reopening of the mines soon will at once disappear in the presence of an earnest desire on the part of the commissioners to put an end to this state of things.

"With the hope that the above will be early taken into favourable consideration, and awaiting your reply."

Another petition was sent to the Commission in June 1879.²

"The respectful memorial of the inhabitants of Weardale in public meeting assembled at St John's Chapel on the 21st June inst.

"To the honourable the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of England, Sheweth: -

“That your memorialists are suffering sad distress from the fact that the lessee of your honourable Commissioners has closed very many of your local mines, and as mining is the only industry in this dale, nearly the whole of the working population are thrown out of work, and are suffering pinching distress.

“Your memorialists submit that it is wrong to the entire dale that all the lead mines should be leased to one person as it literally places a monopoly in the hands of that person. Your memorialists are aware that when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners came into possession of the lead mines they found existing leases to Mr W. B. Beaumont, and that to a considerable degree their hands were bound. But your memorialists beg urgently to ask your honourable Board to consider if it is possible to lease a few portions of this large extent of country, in which lead ores are worked (by tender or otherwise) to separate parties. In such circumstance, your memorialists would have several employers instead of only one upon whom they are solely dependent. Your memorialists therefore implore your honourable board to give immediate consideration, and trust you will without delay find a way to an early attainment of so desirable an end, and give your suffering memorialists work and bread.

“And your memorialists will ever pray.”

In June 1879 the Ecclesiastical Commission decided to declare the year 30th June 1879 to 30th June 1880 to be considered exceptional.

The terms being that Mr Beaumont:

“Shall from the 30th June 1879 to the 30th June 1880 pay and render to the lessors ten pounds sterling money and one - eighteenth part of the ore raised and obtained from the said mines, clean and well washed and free from all manner of charges, he working the said mines in a workman like manner.”

“And Mr Beaumont covenants with the lessor that the render actually made to them in respect of the said mines worked by him during the aforesaid period shall not be less than 112 tons of ore of twenty hundredweight each.”

“The London Lead Company, provided they do not claim their exploration allowance during the period, herein after named, shall be entitled to carry on the mines in the Bollyhope tract from the 30th June 1879 to 30th June 1880 paying and rendering five pounds sterling money and one - eighteenth part of the ore raised and obtained from the said mines clean and well washed and free from all manner of charges, the said Company working the said mines in a workmanlike manner.”³

Following this the mines were reopened, but not without some discontent among the miners as the Alston Herald of 6 September 1879 reported.

“The greatest pleasure was evinced on Saturday last in the district West of Stanhope on the receipt of the news that the “difficulty” which has existed between Mr W. B. Beaumont and his workmen at the lead mines in the neighbourhood of Westgate had been satisfactorily arranged. The terms are much the same as those which existed when the stoppage took place upwards of twelve months ago; and eventually 200 hands signed the agreement. Work was resumed on Monday morning.”

Although the mines had been reopened only around 170 men out of 400 had been employed by September of 1879, and large numbers were emigrating, some to work in coalmines, and others to America or Australia. The Ecclesiastical Commission

having been persuaded to pay the expenses of all emigrants to their port of embarkation, as well as paying for what they needed for the journey.⁴

A letter dated 30 July 1880; from George Pringle the secretary of the Ecclesiastical Commission to Mr Beaumont's agent destroyed the relative calm.⁵

"... I am directed to inform you in reply that, after much careful consideration of the matter, the Commissioners feel themselves unable to prolong the temporary arrangements made with Mr Beaumont." ... "I am to state that it is the opinion of the Commissioners that before any decision could be arrived at on such a proposal it would be necessary that the lessee should furnish them with full information as to his receipts and profits during the past ten years, so as to satisfy them that he has reasonable grounds to complain of hardship, as at present they are under the belief that the working of the mines has yielded him large profits during that period."

This resulted in the closure of the mines once again, although not immediately as some 'negotiation' did take place between Mr Beaumont and the Commissioners.⁶

"With the close of this week the Weardale Lead Miners notices will expire, and the New Year will find the mines belonging to W. B. Beaumont Esq., MP. in Weardale closed. ...

"The London Lead Company's Agent, speaking a few days ago, expressed a fear that unless the dues were lowered, Teesdale would be little better off than Weardale, and said the condition of Weardale was due to the hard heartedness of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Now, Mr W. B. Beaumont, MP. in a letter addressed to his chief agent, Mr Cain, and dated the 22nd inst., throws the blame upon the lessors. From the letter, we learn the following: - "In 1878 the attention of the late Mr Edmund James Smith, the agent to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, was called to the complicated nature of the arrangements of the lessors, and to the great desirability from many points of view of simplifying them, and of reducing the rents, regard being had to the great fall in the value of lead ore, and to the increasing difficulties of lead mining, owing to the richest portions of the Weardale mines; and furthermore pointed out that unless this course was adopted neither the London Lead Company nor I (W.B. Beaumont), lessees of the Commissioners could be expected to, nor would we, risk money in exploring and trying to increase the productiveness of mines not our own; but that on the contrary, we must restrict our operations within a very limited time scale."

"After recounting delays we are informed that Mr Warrington Smythe was selected in 1879 to investigate the whole case. In the meantime a temporary reduction of rent from June 1879 to June 1880 was made and in the middle of this latter year, 1880, Mr Warrington Smythe made his report to the Commissioners, shortly before the death of Mr E. J. Smith, but too late to enable Mr Smith to take any steps in "a question in which he had evinced so much intelligent interest." "This report advised that considerable concessions should be made; but the Commissioners, after Mr Smith's death, not only refused to give effect in any way to the advice of their chosen adviser, but turning their backs on their former course, they have recently stated that, as trustees for the public, they do not feel justified in altering the terms of the lease held by the London Lead Company and myself (Mr W. B. Beaumont) and they decline negotiations upon the subject." Mr Beaumont refers to the Lords of the Admiralty at Alston having met their mining tenants with consideration, and in conclusion says: - "Whatever may be the future of this matter I wish our people to understand that having done all which in me lies to place on a proper basis the

relations of lessor and lessee, the responsibility for the unsatisfactory state of mining operations in Weardale rests not with my agents but with the London Board."

This closure did not last long as at the beginning of January 1882 Mr Beaumont instructed his chief agent to reopen the mines temporarily, pending further negotiations with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The Weardale Lead Miners Committee met at St John's Chapel on the 11th January and sent the following letter to Mr Beaumont.⁷

"Sir

"In consideration of the present season and above all the position of our families and of our lasting attachment to Weardale and its interests, our old Homes, we think it best to accept more respectfully your offer just made of reopening your mines. But to protest both against your agents and the new system. First, we protest against your agents, we your humble servants request you to force your agents J C Cain Esq. and T Rumney to come forward and vindicate their characters against the charges that your brother Walter Beaumont Esq. has made against them, of which we have every reason to believe they cannot. Because we as working men want to have masters that are thoroughly practical and men of honour truth and righteousness over us.

"1. We protest against the new system. Because it is detrimental to your interests. To the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and to our interests coupled with the trade's people that are in the dale. First it is detrimental to your interests. Experienced miners cannot speculate to find new veins of lead ore neither at the main forming ground nor even at the old ground. When they are under this new system and there is many a bing of lead ore in the old ground that will never be worked out. Because men cannot work month after months with little or no money. Lead mining is not like coal mining or ironstone mining always lying at the face. It lays in pockets or ranges. Therefore it is impossible for men to work it without a monthly guarantee or lent cash.

"2. It is detrimental to the interests of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Because there will be many a mine closed that would be kept open if men only had some security for a livelihood. It would yield ore to pay you and keep a far larger open mining field.

"3. It is detrimental to our interests coupled with the interests of the trades people that are in the valley. Where is there a working man that can live month after month with a wife and 4, 5 or children on 10s per month £1 per month, £1 10s per month £2 per month, £2 10s per month or even £3 per month?

"Therefore when an honest working man has not much money made at the month end under the new system he has to bet credit of his tradesman. Therefore it so reasonable to conclude that it is the working man and the tradesman that are running the risk of speculating for the proprietors of Weardale Lead Mines.

"We your humble servants suggest a few things for your consideration trusting that you will do your very best for us as working men and sincerely hope that the good feeling will continue between the Beaumont Family and Weardale Miners.

"1. We ask for 50s Lent money (or subsistence money) per month to every working man.

"2. The Basis of Bargains be on 18s per week. The percentage to begin over and above 18s per week.

“3. That lads get a bargain in the mines not later than 18 years of age.

“4. That we protest against the mines being laid in 6 or 8 weeks for hay-harvest but request that the bargains be let on the first of July as in former times.

“6. That we humbly request you to employ the old men as long as they are able to work. Because we think that it is reasonable. Because they have spent their strength and rigour of manhood for you.

“7. We ask for better ventilation for all mines especially Burtree Pasture Mine.

“8. That we as working men will do our best for you. Because we know that you will have to be at a great outlay when you extend the working of the miner. Because of the ruin and wreckage that has been going on for some years.

“1860 Cain Peart. 6 partners. Was sent to the west end in the whin (Burtree Pasture) and worked for 10 1/2 years there drove a length and slit they sometimes made good money other times very little money, other partnerships were sent. Till at last the place was given up by the masters. The first partnership, (Cain Peart) would not give it up still kept working on the strength of their Lent money still having confidence that beyond the lead ground there would be some good ground. They drove on till at last they come to a pile of good ore 10 inches wide then other men was sent to drive and slit. In 1872 there was above 100 men employed at this very place which with partnership found through their own perseverance and the place yielded thousands of bings of lead ore.

“This is to show that under the new system those many thousands of bings of ore would never have been found for without the lent money all speculation on the part of this partnership would have been impossible.

“1880 June Thomas Dawson 4 pt, (Burtree Pasture Mine) worked 2 months for nothing and at the end of the third month to £2 per man.

“1881 Thomas James, 2 pt worked 1 month got £1 2s 6d per man. The second month got £1 per man, third month £2 5s per man.

Total for 3 month £4 7s 6d per man.

“1879 John Thompson 4 pt worked 17 weeks at 5s per week per man. Through sheer necessity they worked 7 shifts per week per man.

Which come to 8 1/2 per shift.

“1880 John Elliott 2 pt (Killhope Mine) made a trial and cut across in the hard pack 2 fathoms in length in 2 months. They were paid 12s - 6d per man per month. Total for 2 months 25s per man.

“They came to and got good ore and at the quarter end the masters placed other 2 men which made them 4 pt, masters told them they had up and down back and forward to work in. They worked a few weeks then the masters placed another partnership and took half of the ground from them.

“Facts on the old system of Lent Money

“Blood Syke Mine was discovered by the workmen and produced hundreds of bings of lead ore.

“Lodge Syke Mine was the result of the miners speculation they drove a level 100 fathoms for the sum of 30£. It took over one years labour however they succeed in

finding a vein that produced thousands of bings of ore sometimes working at 12s per bing.

“Grove Heads Mine, was proposed by the men they wrought nearly a year before they reached the old workings and had nothing for it by bargain of course they got their Lend money to support them, and contrary to the agents predictions raised thousands of bings of ore in 5 or 6 years and was the inducement or the cause of Craigs Level being driven also led to the finding of the present mine which has produced thousands of bings or ore and sometimes wrought at the low price of 8s per bing.

“Green Lanes Mine is due to a miner urging the masters to risk a little money, his name was Walter Jackson. The result of this trial is well known to every one in the dale there has been hundreds of thousands of bings of lead ore got at this mine.”

There is no record of a reply to this letter, and on the 2 June 1882 the miners met in the Town Hall at St John’s Chapel, after which they sent the following letter to Mr Beaumont.⁸

“Resolution 1. That we protest against the new system of lead mining. Carried unanimously.

“Resolution 2. That we protest against the present agents J. C. Cain and T. Rumney, and do solemnly declare that we will take no more bargains under them. Carried unanimously.

“We protest against the so called New System because it is detrimental to the lessors, lessees and all others concerned in the works.

“We protest against the agents the agents because of the favouritism toward some men and the tyranny practised on others, so that the confidence between the present agents and the workmen is utterly destroyed, we do most humbly pray to you our employer that you will change the New System of working the mines back to the old system explained in a letter to you dated January 11th 1882, also change the present agents and we will do our very best for you as working men. I must add that our enemies spoke the truth in the Echo, June 2nd 1882 as regards the bulk of the miners as a body of sober, quiet, and industrious workmen, and wishful to continue work. If we can get sober, quiet, honest, and trustworthy agents to employ us. As regards the agitators they are not outside the workmen. It is a fact that every man present at this meeting of June 2nd at 7 o’clock, are present working miners, we can give you the names if you desire them. The total number of pickmen employed in your mines in Weardale is 191, of which 159 are against the present system and agents, leaving a small number of 32 men in their favour.

Thomas Emerson secretary to the Weardale Miners Committee.”

“P.S. We would be very glad if you would meet a deputation of miners at any place you might think proper.”

This decision to strike was not supported by all the miners as the following petition shows. 103 men from Weardale, 95 from Allendale and 91 from Rookhope, signed this petition.⁹

"To the Hon. W. B. Beaumont Esq. MP."

"Sheweth"

"That your petitioners having considered the various difficulties connected with the working of the leadmines, during the last few years approach you with thankful acknowledgements for the benefits conferred by you Hon. Sir. Employing us.

"That your petitioners deeply regret your intention to sever connection with the Weardale Lead Miner and respectfully request Hon. Sir. that your resolve may be so reconsidered and arrangements made that it may be our privilege to continue your workmen.

"That your petitioners give no countenance to part of our fellow workmen refusing to work under your present appointed agents and only respectfully request Hon. Sir. for a continuance of employment under the present agents."

The problems of Weardale were summed up in an article, which appeared in the Hexham Herald on 8 July 1882.

"A crisis of a two fold character has come to the lead mining industry in Weardale. On Monday morning the miners under the employment of Mr W. B. Beaumont came out on strike, according to resolutions passed at their meetings, that they would take no more bargains under the present agents and the new system, their second quarter's bargains of the year having terminated at the end of June. In the meantime Mr Beaumont and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners do not appear to have come to any settlement in respect to the further working of the mines from this date. The Board of Commissioners have submitted to Mr Beaumont a scale of rents and dues upon which to base a new lease, failing the acceptance of which the Board are willing to submit the whole question to arbitration by Mr D. Dale; or thirdly will accept an immediate surrender of the lease, taking at a valuation the machinery and movable plant. On the other hand Mr Beaumont wishing to retire from mining has offered to sell out to the Board his leasehold mining interest in the Parish of Stanhope, or transfer it to a new company. The Commissioners are however; not prepared to negotiate for the purchase of such mining interest, and in respect of a new company a guarantee of financial strength would be required. As the scale of royalties submitted does not appear to commend itself to the present lessee, the position is critical, for should none of the terms offered by the Commissioners be accepted we are informed by them that the conditions of the present lease will have to be left undisturbed. It is however to be hoped that six months correspondence between the lessee and lessor will have brought negotiations so close as to result in a speedy and lasting settlement of the terms on which the mines may be worked in future."

On the 27 September the miners held a meeting at St John's Chapel, Weardale, to discuss the refusal to take their bargains.¹⁰

"A crowded and enthusiastic meeting of miners was held on Wednesday night at St John's Chapel. Mr Thomas Emmerson, secretary, was unanimously called to the chair. After the Lord's Prayer had been fervently offered.

"The CHAIRMAN said he had been in the front of this movement, and intended to remain so if opportunity was to offer itself. There were always two sides to every question. He was of opinion they were right. (cheers) They did not expect to get through life without labour and persecution, but he hoped they were prepared to

abide by the former resolutions to take no more bargains under the present agents and the “new system.” (Prolonged cheers)

“MR JOHN ROBINSON, in moving the first resolution, said when he took a stand he always meant winning, and it would grieve him much if the miners gave way. Such gentlemen as Mr J V Walton, Mr Bainbridge, Dr Livingstone, and Mr Dawson has promised substantial support. He then moved the following resolutions.

“That this meeting is of opinion that the system of short agreements pursued by the lessors and lessees of the Weardale mines is detrimental to the mines and miners and as such prevents prospecting thus impoverishing public property.”

(Applause)

“MR THOMAS PEADON had pleasure in seconding the resolution and it was carried amid cheers.

“MR HENRY FEATHERSTONE moved the second resolution as follows: -

“That we adhere to the former resolution not to take any more bargains under the present agents and new system.”

“MR THOMAS DOWSON seconded, and MR THOMAS SMITH (Sunderland) urged them, after these terrible sufferings which had gone forth to the world, to stand fast. They had the sympathy of all working men. Any who blacklegged deserved boycotting. Treat them as lepers. The speaker concluded an eloquent address amid enthusiastic cheering.

The resolution was carried with acclamation.

“MR WILLIAM MILBURN moved MR JOHN WILSON seconded and MR WALTER BEAUMONT supported, a resolution that the committee be empowered to take all honourable means to inform the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Home Secretary to get the present state of things in Weardale remedied.”

Some of the miners did return to work as the Weardale Bargain book shows, but only 71 men were employed.¹¹

W. B. Beaumont Bargains 6th January to 31st March 1883.

Mine Working	No of Bargains	No of Men	Type of Bargain
Killhope	1	6	Raise ore in veins and flats
Burtree Pasture	1	2	Raise ore in Slitts
Craigs Level	1	1	Raise ore from Deads
Greenlaws	4	22	Raise ore in old ground
Groverake	9	36	Raise ore in old ground
West Pasture	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	Raise ore in old ground
Totals	17	71	

The Hexham Courant on the 23 June 1883 announced that the mines that had been given up in Weardale by Mr Beaumont had been relet by the Ecclesiastical Commission.

"The new lessees are a large and wealthy London mining company, the chairman of which is Mr Batters, London. We are also informed that the new company have power given to sub-let any portion they may desire. They have also taken the whole of the plant &c., off the hands of the lessors, and are busy making arrangements to commence operations about the beginning of next month, when they expect to be in a position to give employment to some hundreds of pickmen. Mr Blenkiron has been offered the post of chief agent, with Mr Trulees as sub agent. What has been the great drawback to the thorough development of mining - a lent money system to the miners - will be again instituted."

This ended the strike, but the miner's behaviour must be questioned as the strike benefited them in no way. If anything it benefited the Beaumont Company, making it so much easier for them to close the mines and remove themselves from what they considered to be a loss making situation.

On Tuesday the 18th March 1890 the London Lead Company minutes record a dispute with the washer boys.

"A deputation of washer boys from the Coldbury mine had seen the Superintendent and stated that they are not satisfied with an offer to increase their wages 4d per day to the older boys and 3d per day to the younger boys. The Superintendent suggested that it might be advisable to give them an extra 1d per day so as to prevent any further agitation."

"The Superintendent was given permission to use his discretion as to increasing the wages of the boys who are employed by the Company."

In October 1892 the men of the London Lead Company refused to take their bargains when they were informed that their working hours were to be changed. The men had worked up to this time forty hours per week spread over four days. The company wanted them to work forty hours over five days. The miners wrote to the Northern Echo explaining their position, this was published on the 10 December 1892.

"For many years lead mining has been the staple industry of Teesdale, large quantities of lead being raised every year in the mines worked by the London Lead Company. The mines are principally situated in the manors from five to ten miles distant from Middleton in Teesdale where a large number of the men employed at the mines reside. Owing to the lonely situation of the mines far away from any human habitation the company provide large lodging houses or shops (to use the native term) near the principle entrance to each mine, in which the labourers stay until they complete their weekly work. The miners were required to give 40 hours labour each week, but to meet this case they were allowed to complete their work in four days the hours being divided as follows: Mondays 8 hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 12 hours: and Thursday 8 hours, commencing on Monday at 11 am, and finishing on Thursday at 2 pm, a system not in accordance with the eight hours movement but one very satisfactory to the miners themselves, taking into consideration mine shop life and its surroundings. The miners work chiefly by piece, being paid a certain sum per fathom, such price being fixed quarterly by the company's agents, according to the nature of the stone or vein in prices varying from £10 to £1 per fathom. On the miners going to the company's offices on October 28th to renew their bargains, they found that the directors had laid down a new system of working, the conditions of which when laid before the men, were so unjust that upwards of 150 refused to accept their bargains. By the new conditions they were required to spend 106 hours in and about the mine shops each week for the purpose of working 40 hours in the

mine, the shifts ranging over five days instead of four. The miners would gladly have accepted the new system had they been able to get to their own homes each night, but under the new rules obliged to take their meat with them to the mine shop and stay there all the week, they refused to accept them but offered to work an extra hour on the Monday and Thursday, thus making their shifts two 9 hours and two 11 hours. The directors refused this. ...

“Another injustice under which the miners suffer is the system of payment of wages. They are paid monthly, but do not receive the wages (which are by no means large, averaging about 15s per week) until a month after they are worked for. Thus a person commencing to work in the mines has to work eight weeks before he receives any wages, a state of affairs unparalleled in other parts of England. ...”

The miners then offered to return to work under the old system while the new one was put to arbitration. This was also refused, so the miners offered to go back under protest on the new terms offered by the directors if arbitration was granted within three months. This too was refused, the miners being told they must work the new terms unconditionally.¹² Mr Scarth tried to act as mediator, as he had done in 1872 and the miners set up an appeal fund; eight collectors being appointed to obtain subscriptions to their cause. At a meeting of the miners recorded in the Northern Echo on the 10 December 1892¹³, T Brunskill said that during the 6 weeks they had been out of employment he considered £600 had been lost. At this meeting they resolved to accept the five-day system, but not under the conditions put down by the Company, they wished to work their shifts without a break and to take their meals in with them (so saving time wasted leaving and returning to their place of work).

On Friday the 16th December the men were informed that the directors, with a slight alteration had accepted their offer. The directors required a full 8 hours work in the mine, and if the miners wished to have some bait, extra time would have to be added. If they allowed three quarters of an hour for bait, that would mean 8 hours and three quarters each day.¹⁴

The offer was:

In the case of one set.

Monday	10 am	to	6.45 pm
Tuesday	7.15 am	to	4.00 pm
Wednesday	6 am	to	2.45 pm
Thursday	8 am	to	4.45 pm
Friday	5 am	to	2.45 pm

In the case of two sets

1st Set

Monday	10 am	to	6.45 pm
Tuesday	5.15 am	to	2 pm
Wednesday	2 pm	to	10.45 pm
Thursday	5.15 am	to	2 pm
Friday	5 am	to	1.45 pm

2nd Set

Tuesday	2 pm	to	10.45 pm
Wednesday	5.15 am	to	2 pm
Thursday	2 pm	to	10.45 pm
Friday	2 pm	to	10.45 pm
Saturday	5 am	to	1.45 pm

The shifts were so arranged as to allow the men working in single sets to return home on Tuesday for fresh supplies of food, those working in the double sets to return on Tuesdays and Wednesdays alternately for fresh food. The men were to be allowed to take their food into the mine, but they had to take a break for three-quarters of an hour mid-shift.

Mr T Brunskill proposed the directors offer be accepted, Mr Michael Richardson seconded this. Mr Joseph Raistrick and Mr T Cooper opposed this motion. It was put to the vote and the men refused to the offer 63 votes to 44. At a subsequent meeting the same day the directors offer was accepted and the men returned to work the following Monday.

This strike was mentioned on seven occasions in the Company minutes.¹⁵

Tuesday the 1st November 1892.

"The mines manager reported that he had received a deputation from the Teesdale miners. They objected to the conditions on which Bargains are to be let, that is the work being spread out over 5 days of 8 hours each and proposed to work Monday 9 hours, Tuesday 11 hours, Wednesday 11 hours and Thursday 9 hours. The manager was instructed to adhere to the original instructions."

Tuesday the 8th November 1892.

"The miners unanimously objected to take their Bargains on any other terms than that of working 4 days per week but made the following suggestion. To resume work under the 4 day system with a reference to arbitration of the question of the number of days in which this work is to be performed."

"The Court declined to make any concession in the terms of the Bargains."

Tuesday the 15th November 1892.

"Mr Millican reported that the miners remain out but he suggested that public notices be issued to obtain suitable men new and old, on the Company's terms, which the Court agreed."

Tuesday the 29th November 1892.

"There was no change in the miners strike."

Tuesday the 13th December 1892.

"Mr Millican informed the Court that the miners strike continues but is expected to terminate this week."

Tuesday the 20th December 1892.

"The miners strike was terminated the Bargains being let on the Company's terms, a full 8 hours per day for 5 days."

Tuesday the 3rd January 1893.

"The miners had asked the Court to advance each miner at the next pay day the sum of £2 to be repaid £1 per month out of their regular pay, which the Court agreed."

There is one brief reference to a dispute in 1899; there is no other information available, as the next minute book has been lost.

Tuesday the 17th October 1899.¹⁶

“The washer boys at Little Eggheshope and Wiregill have gone on strike.”

¹ NRO 672/C/31. Northumberland Record Office.

² Hexham Herald 28th June 1879. Northumberland Record Office.

³ NRO 672/C/31. Northumberland Record Office.

⁴ Hexham Herald 27th September 1879. Northumberland Record Office.

⁵ NRO 672/C/31. Northumberland Record Office.

⁶ Hexham Herald 31st December 1881. Northumberland Record Office.

⁷ NRO 672/C/31. Northumberland Record Office.

⁸ Hexham Herald 10th June 1882. Northumberland Record Office.

⁹ NRO 672/C48. Northumberland Record Office.

¹⁰ Hexham Courant 30th September 1882. Northumberland Record Office.

¹¹ Weardale Bargain Book. Northumberland Records Office NRO 672/E/5A/23.

¹² London Lead Company Court Minutes. LLC36. Held at the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers,

¹³ Northern Echo 10 December 1892. Darlington Library Local Studies.

¹⁴ Ibid. 17th December 1892.

¹⁵ London Lead Company Court Minutes. LLC 36. Held at the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers,

¹⁶ Ibid. LLC 37.